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arden



Arden

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Dedication

In memory of

Adrian Huling
(1989-2009)

Brian Lukas
(1989-2009)

Cover Art

Night from a trip

Gina Alberici

(Front Cover)

tunnel 10

Neal Jordan

(Back Cover)

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Kocian Awards

Euclid's Lines

Best of Art

Neal Jordan

Freight Train

Best of Poetry

Karen Glass

Advantage

Best of Prose

Eric Maxwell

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Freight Train

Karen Glass

The kitchen wall fell in
Over the top of my
Daughter's headboard

All the baby pictures flew with the wind
A man I didn't know traveled an hour to
Present me a weathered old photo
My first in a tiny pink dress

Pieces of my grandmother's china from Finland
Littered the place that used to be a bathroom
One slender tea cup survived somehow
Buried under cabinets of canned goods

Black Walnut trees and lanky old pines
Twisted and winged
Snapped and gashed
From their birth places
Leaving gnarled, red wirey graves

My wedding dress survived, ironically
Some old books, the baby's stuffed hippo
And the unwashed dishes

The roof of the house disappeared
Tops of closets cleaned out finally
My teenage son's naked magazine pictures
Unhidden from some secret place
Strewn about the yard
For the Sunday School volunteers to find



The whittled sculpture of Jesus
By the old man in Mexico
Who didn't know how to sign his own name
Found under the thick layers of insulation
That covered every inch of breathing space

Even after there were no trees left
Just a jagged claw of a house
You could come there at night
Lie back on the roof of a car
Stare into the South Georgian sky
And you could be home again
And nothing was broken
Except time.



Advantage

Eric Maxwell

Josh and I rode home in his white, mud-splattered, '92 Ford pick-up truck; the intensely humid Georgia afternoon pounded down upon us – the kind of searing heat that made you sweat through your clothes, the kind of sweat that glued you to the truck's leather seats. The sound of pistons pumping and gears grinding in the engine filled my ears and the sight of his dark brooding face filled my eyes. His dark features – intense chocolate eyes, tousled mousy brown hair, and bronzed olive skin – made it appear as though he was in a constant state of mental turmoil. I knew that his brooding was only in appearance – mine was in practice.

Though Josh and I were both seventeen, his muscular frame towered well over mine – he was one of the biggest guys in school. I was gangly and still filling out my awkward teenage frame. Josh was pretty smart, but my mind was always too busy dreaming to focus on school.

Dreaming. It's what I do best. Since the day I met Josh, I have spent countless hours dreaming of an ideal life with him. I'd created an entire alternate existence for the two of us. But that's all that it was – a dream. I know that he didn't think of me that way. He didn't even know that I thought of him that way. We were now and would always be friends.

The warm wet air rushing across my skin allowed my mind to release fantasy and embrace reality. My unblinking eyes studied his features; locks of hair peered out from under his baseball cap, angry eyes focused on the road, pink lips stiff with concentration. The frame of statuesque pine trees and red Georgia clay suited him well. He was rugged and beautiful.

I thought of the scene that had played out before me earlier today. He was at his locker with an arm around Sarah Hardin, pulling the petite southern belle into his broad shoulders. I gagged at the thought of it. And that's when my stupid mouth had to ruin the peace between us.

"So, did you ask her out?"

"Who?" Josh replied.



I rolled my eyes, realizing I had already dived in and may as well follow through. "Sarah. You were all over her today."

"What do you care?"

"You don't have to be an asshole about it. I was only asking."

"Adam," Josh said, "sometimes I *really* hate you."

The thought of him hating me made my face flush with sadness. I had wanted to be the one in his arms, not the one fighting with him in the truck. What I felt was the most honest and pure thing in the world – love. I was in love with Josh and the world around us would not be okay with that. Hell, Josh himself wouldn't be okay with that.

What kind of world had I imagined myself into? Did I think I could just declare my love for him and hope for happily ever after? Yes, that's exactly what I thought. I can't deny myself happiness even in my own naïve mind. I wanted a land of princes on white horses; I was in a land of confederate flags and machismo. Josh, the real Josh, just didn't fit my imaginary world. If he had the tiniest idea of how I felt, the pain would feel like shattered glass in his heart.

That wasn't what I really wanted, though. I couldn't wish that kind of pain on him, but I also didn't want him to feel sorry for me because he'd never feel the same for me.

At that moment, he'd seen me staring at him and the argument started again. "What is it now?"

The biting acid in the tone of his voice made it seem as if he knew how I felt and it disgusted him. He'd hissed it out and looked as if he'd felt justified in doing so.

That was all I could handle. Tears welled in my eyes, but I refused to let this side of him get to me; I would not let this jerk of a redneck hurt my feelings. I looked out the window at the peeling bark of the passing pine trees in an attempt to keep my emotions in check. When I sniffled, Josh pulled the truck to a stop.

He put his hand on my shoulder and I turned my head



toward him. He leaned back and his hands rested in his lap. He didn't say anything. We looked into each other's eyes. I cleared my throat to egg him on. He'd either stopped to continue fighting or apologize, what was he waiting for? He blinked and waited intently as if he wanted me to speak, but what could I say?

He slid across the seat toward me. The intensity of his stare into my eyes made me nervous. The nearness of him was almost too much; it sent my pulse into a frenzy. His right hand grabbed the back of my head and forced my lips to his. His left hand grabbed my back and pulled my body towards him. I tasted a faint hint of mint gum as our tongues touched. I was in complete shock, felt as if I would explode. This moment was something I had dreamt of and conceded to the realm of impossibility. My body was pressed so tightly to his that I could actually feel him shaking; just as terrified as I was and, I hoped, just as excited. My nervous heart pounded so fiercely that it felt as if it would explode out of my throat.

"I'm sorry," Josh mumbled as he pulled away, "I shouldn't have done that."

What was he thinking? That was one hell of a mixed signal. I know that I hadn't imagined the intensity that he'd kissed me with and now we were suddenly plunged into stunned silence even as the sun's rays seemed to urge us along. They cast such a strong glare through the windshield that we only had two choices – look into each other's eyes or look away. I finally caved in. My will to keep my emotions inside snapped like a dry twig.

"Josh, I love you." I blurted.

That was terrible. He'd just regretted kissing me and here I was telling him I loved him. On the other hand, maybe it would be the pull that I needed to bring him back to me - or not. I turned toward him, my face wrenched in pain from the delusional declaration I had just made. He said nothing, just started the truck and pulled back onto the road.

From my window the giant pine trees blended together into a massive green blur. I couldn't help but wonder how that sit-



uation would have played out if I'd been Sarah Hardin. It would have gone brilliantly, I was sure. I realized the trees weren't the only thing green.

I knew I shouldn't say anything else. My mind was fully aware that I would undoubtedly make a complete idiot of myself if I spoke again, but I couldn't just leave things alone. This is something I'd been waiting for and I could not stop now just because I was completely inept at it.

Out of the corner of my eye I kept sneaking glances of Josh. He didn't look angry, so maybe it was time to try again. I leaned the left side of my body onto the leather seat and rested my head on my shoulder. Did I look sexy? I hoped so.

"Do you really regret that?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he finally said.

Josh's eyes narrowed.

"Can we talk about it?" I asked.

I reached for him, but he shook his head.

He shifted nervously in his seat, eventually shrugging his shoulders. That was not a good enough answer for me. I needed clear answers right now, boundaries that I could abide by to know *how* far was *too* far.

I couldn't force him, I wasn't the kind of person who would drive someone to do something against their will - but at the same time I couldn't force myself to stifle my feelings. I looked at him again. His forehead was wrinkled and he was sweating nervously.

"Maybe we should just forget about it," I lied, hoping to provoke another reaction from him. It worked.

Josh pulled the truck down a dirt road, a canopy of oak trees hung overhead. He put it in park. The engine grumbled as it bounced up and down, then died.

The dust drifted outside casting strange shadows. His eyes drilled into me. Josh leaned forward and pushed me onto my back. A rush of blood surged through my body. This was more intense than I had ever imagined it would be.



He straddled me and bent down to kiss my neck. I smiled and laughed, *truly* laughed for the first time. I loved every sensation; the feel of his hot breath, the tickling of his stubble, the softness of his lips. Then he finally said what I had been waiting to hear.

“I love you too.”

And then I knew that no more words were needed. Josh lifted himself off of me and I wanted to slide up the seat so I could sit upright again, but as soon as I was on my side he flipped me over onto my stomach. It was completely effortless for him. He held his body weight on top of me as he began to kiss my neck again. The sheer bulk of him was uncomfortable to be under and words became necessary again.

“You’re kind of heavy,” I interjected weakly. “Let me up.”

“Don’t you like this?” His voice had changed.

It was over. I lay there completely frozen in shock. The cabin of the truck was burning hot and I felt the sweat dripping from his body to mine. I couldn’t breathe. I didn’t want to.

“Are you okay? How was it?” Josh offered excitedly, still lying on top of me.

Did we just experience the same thing? He had forced himself on me, hadn’t he? How could he ask that after what he’d just done to me?

“I’m okay. It was okay.” I choked out.

“I’ve never done it before,” his hands lightly brushed the side of my face, “I guess you haven’t either.”

I just wanted him to shut up. Everything he said got under my skin and on my nerves. He just kept going on and on like nothing bad had happened. The casual way he delivered that line sent the reality of what just happened rushing to my head. I burst into tears. Josh sat up and pulled my limp naked body to his.

He pressed my face into his sweaty chest and wrapped his arms around me.

As I convulsed loud sobs broke from my throat and my



tears ran down his chest. Though I wasn't sure about what had happened between us, I found myself enjoying his comforting and warm embrace. His big hands brushed their way up and down my spine, soothing me into silence.

"I should get you home," he cooed into my ear.

As we pulled up in front of my house, I was unsure of what to say. Josh jumped out of his truck and opened the door for me. I numbly slid out of the passenger seat and stumbled as I attempted to stand.

"Whoa, easy tiger," Josh smiled.

"Sorry. My legs, they feel like rubber."

He walked me inside my house, holding my arm around his shoulder like I'd hurt my ankle. I plopped down on the couch.

"Are you gonna be okay by yourself?" he questioned.

I nodded. He turned and walked out, pulling the door closed behind him. When I heard his truck drive away, I crawled to the bathroom. For a few minutes, I rested the side of my face on the cold tile floor. I undressed myself and slumped against the side of the shower stall. I let the water wash over me. I felt so many things at once and wanted it all to go away. I wanted the water to wash it all away. Exhaustion, weakness, soreness – they rose to the surface and rinsed away in tiny rivers. No matter how long I stayed in there, there were things I couldn't wash away. I felt ashamed, embarrassed, betrayed and used. I felt dirty, horribly, horribly dirty. No shower could cleanse that feeling from me.

I found the strength to stand again. I shut off the water and walked to the medicine cabinet. I looked at myself in the mirror. My eyes were blood red from crying. My face was so pale that I looked sick. I reached my shaky hands out to open the medicine cabinet and scanned the labels for something to relax me. I choked down a Valium with a mouthful of water and trudged to my room.

Clothes. I wanted to put clothes on. I wanted to hide my shame, I couldn't stand to be naked and exposed anymore. I



put on a long sleeve shirt and sweatpants and I couldn't care less how warm it was. I was covered; my body belonged to me again.

I flopped onto the soft sheets of my bed and stared blankly at the ceiling. There was so much in my head that I couldn't focus on one particular thing – but there was one thing I was avoiding. I closed my eyes for one brief moment and I felt Josh's hands searching across my body – my eyes shot open and my heart pounded fiercely as I sat up. My head turned left and right as I searched for him. My hands raked across my body trying to push him away, panicked and terrified – but he wasn't there. It was just in my head.

I tried to remember what had happened, tried to place the pieces together to form a coherent account. Bits of the afternoon flashed through my mind; the look on his face, the rich red clay, the taste of his kiss, the stiff pine trees, pulses pounding, the sweltering heat, the way my skin tingled, and the smile on my face.

Smile? There in his truck while we were, while *he* was, well – I had been smiling. The sequence of events slowly faded back to my mind; the kiss, the removing of clothes, and then sex – but was it *rape*? I told him I wasn't ready – well, I remember thinking I wasn't ready. I told him – what had I told him? What had he said to me?

I was startled by a knock on the door. I got up from the bed and walked to the living room, I realized it was Josh. I hesitated – should I let him in? Yes, I had questions and he was the only one with the answers. I opened the door.

“Hey, how are you?” He leaned in to kiss me on the cheek. “I came to check up on you.”

“I'm fine.” I mumbled as I backed away.

“You don't seem fine.” He reasoned. “What's wrong?”

“You, you're what's wrong.” I sputtered.

“What are you talking about?”

“This afternoon you, you forced yourself on me...didn't you?” I questioned.



"Adam, how could you even think that?" Josh shook his head. "I didn't force myself on you at all, you were completely into it."

"What?" I retorted.

"Don't you remember?" He pleaded.

I looked into his eyes, the eyes that could not lie to me. He leaned in to me and I was powerless. Our lips met in an explosive kiss that obliterated the confusion in my mind, and I drifted back to what *really* happened.

"You're kind of heavy," I laughed. "Let me up."

"Don't you like this?" His voice had changed, it became sincere and sweet. "Here, let me move a little bit."

In that moment, I knew that he would never hurt me. He loved me. The most tender and safe feeling in the world. No matter how menacing his figure was, I knew that I could trust him because he'd said the one thing that makes everyone trustworthy. So I followed his lead.

He lifted up the back of my shirt and his hands massaged up and down my back. I writhed below him in pleasure. He kissed his way from the base of my spine up to my neck. It sent a tingle through me, a heat wave of blood. The passion I felt was unlike anything my fertile mind could have created in my day-dreams.

"Doesn't this feel good?" He asked, wanting permission to continue.

The tone in his voice made my body shudder and I moaned in response, taking in every sensation he had to offer.

"Maybe we shouldn't do this here." I suggested.

"Shh," was his only reply.

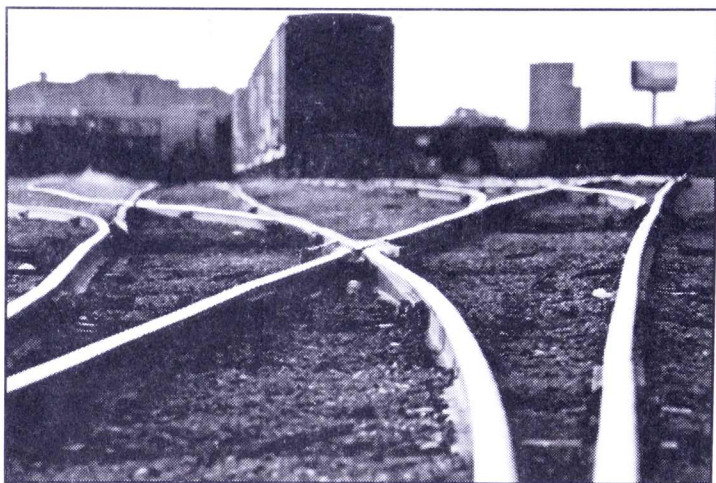
His next few movements were swift and skilled; my mind barely had time to register them all. He pulled my t-shirt up over my head and I saw his shirt crumple to the floor. He yanked down my pants and underwear and I heard his fly unzip.

"Adam, I love you." He whispered into my ear.



Euclid's lines

Neal Jordan



ghostwriter

Anna Dunson

Write your way out of dying buildings
these lines like hallways I crawl over
knees for hands, feet like amputees
through the openings of vowels
the o, the ohs of God for my own name
This life absent of you feels absent of me
attempts to quotation mark myself
into your posted confessions fail
these purgings detailing her greens of convenience
are binged on by my passerby eyes, hazel
that scan with the stop and start of two typewriters
in standstill conversation with one another
Their inked ribbons hammerstruck too repeatedly
to leave anything but impressions of assumptions



Carolina Widow

Danielle Thompson

Lost in the valley
Between grey pain and sweet comfort,
She walked among the ranks of the fallen,
Aging with those who age no more.
Fallen stones in sinking fields,
Crush the heart of the woman.
Frayed flags waved to her, saving her
From losing all hope of the one she loved.

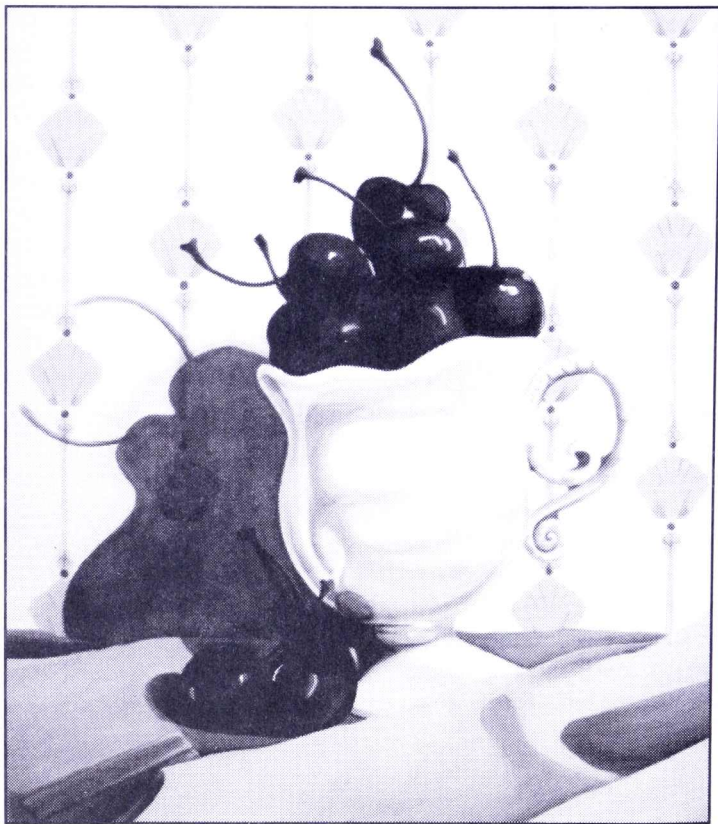
The others long ago said to her,
Take heart, be strong, you loved him *well*,
He did not die in vain.
But years had passed since phrases
Of sympathy crossed her ears,
Years had passed since his hand touched her face,
And years were not enough to bridge the gap
Between mourning and eventide.

That day she did not want to be strong,
For the children, for herself.
That day, among the weathered words on marble,
The Carolina widow longed to see him once again.
That day, it was she, not he,
Who was the lone, fallen, unknown soldier.



Tina's Cherries

Stacy Tsui



She

Molly Mitchell

She is sick of religion.
She likes having sex to Wilco.
She has never played Nintendo.
She keeps gloves in the glove box of her car.
She remembers when music was a part of war.
She thinks the Bible is full of unreliable narrators.
She wishes it were still legal to put cocaine in Coca-Cola.
She believes that one day the Earth will be black and blue from
all of the asphalt.
She learns from mistakes after she makes them.



You Died at the GAP

Chris Beyer

You should be screaming. You don't know how it happened, but your husband just bled all over the new carpet. You should be sad he's dying, but you really like that carpet. Besides, at this point you still have no idea what's going on. You know you were asleep: detached. Then, you know your daughter woke your husband up. You also know that your daughter then bit through the epidermis, even down through the hypodermis and adipose tissue in your husband's neck, lacerating and evicting the ramus communicans vein from inside your husband's neck. You know this because you're a nurse: an observer. You're always in a crisis, but never actually part of it until now. You know that the only way you got your daughter to stop biting your husband's neck was to break her's. This is all really just gratuitous. Right now, you're running.

You're running away from whatever it is that just made your husband try to kill you. You're running away from whatever it is that just made you kill your daughter. Ten year old infanticide. You know all the pro-life groups would be pissed. That's the ultimate full birth 43rd trimester abortion, an abortion super sized for sixty seven extra cents; it even comes with a little Dora the Explorer action figure. You know it's messed up, killing your own kid just to try to save your husband, but everyone rationalizes things. The Pope would be crying if he knew what you just did.

You think this until you get outside. The whole neighborhood, this little slice of Americana, just imploded on itself. Your neighbor's in his front yard; standing over there in a Donna Karan "His and Hers" embossed bathrobe, shooting his wife in the face.

You know it's probably for the best; that one time you came home from work early you'd caught her cheating with Jose, the pool boy. Even when Armageddon isn't just a few kilobytes away from a full download, everything's still on the verge of breaking apart.

Right now though, you're running to your car. The keys are dangling in your hand creating a symphony of desperation.



The wind chimes of corporate vacations telling the story of your life; a collection of memories set inside novelty plastic covers containing print that lets everyone know, "I ate conch at Jimmy's Shrimp Shack in Biloxi," or, "Jesus died for my sins: I'm getting my money's worth." Right now, that conch seems like a pretty good alternative to an aborted child and a sort-of dead patriarch. You get in the car and, out of habit, check to see if your coupon for that 20 dollar oil change plus complimentary detailing is still sitting on the dash of your made in China, assembled in America, "part of the solution, not part of the problem," hybrid car.

Now you're leaving African American tire tracks all over the pavement of your cookie cutter neighborhood, just trying to get away. No real destination, but right now, that's not important. What is important is surviving long enough to make it to that next sale at Macy's; At least with all these people dying around you, you know you won't have to fight as hard next time for that perfect pair of pink Birkenstock pump loafers, two for one, no less. That's the upside. The downside of this right now is Mr. Johnson just came running at your car, covered in blood. You swerve and it's a near hit. Near hit because good old mister Johnson's head takes off your passenger side rear view mirror. All you can think is, "I hope that doesn't fuck up my lease." This car's for appearances, and you didn't actually buy it yet. You think this, and you think that now that you've run over him, he'll never tell you who his landscaper is. You think this even as you hear said neighbor's femur snap under the weight of your car as you run him over. You know this because you're a nurse. Just like in all those TV shows; just like those shows, you're detached. You analyze all the bones and breaks and severe contorsal lacerations that you inflict on neighbor after neighbor as you run them down during your escape through the neighborhood. You make it out onto the highway, the United States commerce system, the agency that helped define the constitutionality of the Civil Rights movement, but just like that movement, the victory is short lived. You swerve to miss a stopped bus, and then you crash that hybrid car into a tree, and

then you're asleep: just like your whole life.

Fast forward to the modern day Alamo. Some other survivors and you are walled up behind the safety of Milwaukee's Mayfair Mall: secure behind all the gift shops, Abercrombie-wash-board-abs-and-all mannequins, Yankee Rose scented candles, and the Orange Julius. People say that you can't buy security with capitalism, but right now you'd beg to differ. These people and you, it's all kind of like a movie. You're all typecast. You with the blond hair: motherly, maternal, even your job description tells you that you care. The black cop that you know is supposed to be a bad ass, created by God to have a limited dialogue. That other guy, the one with the plan, the ideas, the only one of you making minimum wage: he's saying exactly what he's supposed to right now, and before you die, you'll probably get it on. Scratch that, it's just like a movie. A mathematician could formulate what you're going to do with all the x equals your fear level multiplied by y . Y stands for how cliché you are. You're all just going through the motions, and so is your "life," and it's almost over. It's just like a movie where everything's just a prop, and every actor's just really asleep and going through the motions. You fast forward again.

You're inside the Baby Gap. Everyone in the group thought it would be a good idea to check the mall for any infected soccer moms or grandpas. Bad idea: this suburban housewife's sunflower patterned, garden party ready, in style, seasonally appropriate at almost any occasion summer dress: right now, it's covered in blood, but you still want one. Well right now, she's got you. You feel her teeth sink in to the Sternocleidomastoideus tissue. She bites even further into your Maxillary artery. You know this, again, because you're a nurse, and just like all those patients, even in your own death, you're just an observer. The last thing you see as everything goes black is the display stand advertising Ecuadorian, imperfectly perfect, bubbles and all, Martini glasses: only \$29.99. You know you'd love to buy them, but now you're dead.

Then again, you're alive, sort of. The same way you were before, really. Except instead of walking into half off sales and

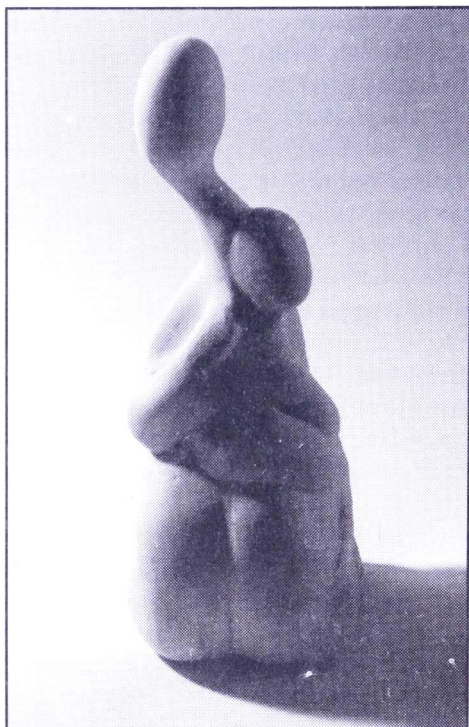


blue tag events like a mindless drone, you're chasing after the "Buy One, Get One" of the still "living." The blue tag sale of fresh, never frozen, human meat.



Memory

Patti Madeo



Thief

Jarred Wiehe

I am element number 87; big, giant, Francium
With 87 protons and 87 electrons.
Well, at least I used to be, before the incident...
See, I was floating along, minding my own business,
When this little, puny, 16 electron
Sulfur comes up and puts his grubby outer level on mine.
Imagine! The nerve!
I told him, "Why don't you get your own electrons
you pitiful non-metal?"
Well, he did...
I hadn't moved more than two feet before I noticed...
I had no outer level!
That little Sulfur stole my only valence shell!
He robbed me blind;
He left me only with my kernel and my nucleus.
I felt sick and violated.
I was now a loser, an outcast, an-an-an-
ION!
He took advantage of my low ionization energy, and turned me
into a
Freak with a plus one charge.
It is times like these that I wish I were a Noble Gas.

Learning to Sew

Lacey Allmond

I remember plundering through your aluminum shed, all the rusted tinkering of a time past, sheltered from the elements. Lawn mowers, spades, and rakes, the smell of gasoline and oil. I would run through your yard, hiding behind the pink azaleas, throwing pecans and pulling up daffodils.

Your house always smelled like moth balls, and laundry. In the summer sun your clothes hung out on the line. I hated your stiff, thin towels and that green bath tub with the white shower chair. And, your bath closet held all the mysteries of elderly care. Your silver wig sat untouched on the vanity lamp. Your hand sewn polyester suits, navy and watermelon pink hung in the cedar closet.

I loved to rummage through your things, when you were busy napping. The soap operas blaring from the television set. I flipped through your romance novels, the stacks and stacks beside your sofa, wishing they had more pictures like the one on the front.

We'd sleep with the windows raised because your little window unit couldn't cool the back of the house, the crickets working late in the heat of the night to sing broken lullabies.

I never understood how you were from Michigan, and everyone else I knew always grew up in Georgia. You had the bluest eyes I had ever seen. You had a modest laugh, and big white hands.

Your sewing machine sat in the living room against the wall, pins and fabric neatly tucked away. You said you'd teach me how to sew; I remember we made pillows once.

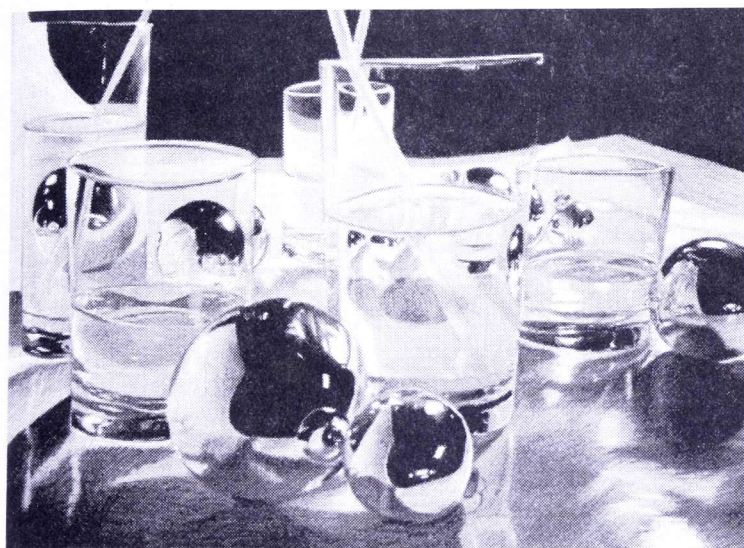
When mom and dad divorced you saw no sides of right or wrong. You simply offered to cook us meals, or to let me spend the night, and with no needles or thread you continued to show me how to sew.

After the funeral, when the rest of the family pillaged through your furniture, jewels, and china, I was content to inherit the old brown sewing basket, full of folded scraps, because you had promised to teach me how to sew.



De-Fractions

Ma'ayan Moskovich



Agnus Dei

Adrianna Mateo

January 21st, 1951: a Boy Scout Sunday.

We looked proud that afternoon,

the Eagle scouts of Troop Three
Thirty Three.

Starched and pressed, fresh

young faces in uniform brown

With badges that gleamed in reflected light

of a stained glass mosaic of Mary.

A clarion voice chanted the procession:

“Jerusalem – cry unto her that

Her warfare is accomplished; that

her iniquity is pardoned.” And we

Went through the motions of mass,

all the boys lined in rows

In front of the altar, blank faces

waiting to be imprinted with

The Word of God. I tuned in

and out of Father Caduto’s fervent homily.

He paced, back and forth

between the altar and our rows,

Sometimes grasping our shoulders

to emphasize a point, his hand lingering...

I don’t recall everything

from that Sunday, but I’ll try

And tell the truth best I can

like I’ve been told to do.

“Blessed are you when people hate you,

and when they exclude and insult you,

And denounce your name as evil on account

of the Son of Man,” Father began.



And Father then asked each of us
what we wanted to be when we grew up.

Bright men to count our money:
alms for the poor and funds for the Church.

(He punctuated every word just like that:
I can hear him in my sleep.)

He came to me and asked, "What's your name, son?"

I said, "Davets. I want to be a priest."

He boomed: "Give this young man
a round of applause –

and addressed the young boys and their parents,
(Who were clapping but were secretly envious),

As I took a sip of the Blood of Christ

But was stifled by his mother who swathed more cloth
around her child, covering his mouth.

Before I knew it, the service had ended.

Father closed the mass with the final prayer:
“Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.”

I went to see Father Caduto afterwards
in the room behind the altar adorned
With enticing lilies; some had not yet opened
and the elongated buds made me think of shotgun bullets.

His lips were bent in a gentle smile as light
trickled through the grime on a stained glass window,
The afternoon light flooding the room and
bathing His white robes in a crimson halo.

The taste of sour wine still reminds me of the sobbing infant,
Silenced by the woman to whom God had entrusted it.

References for *Agnus Dei*:

Agnus Dei: the last prayer of a Roman Catholic Mass; literally translated as *lamb of God*
St. Agnes (of Rome): patron saint of virgins and rape victims; her feast day is celebrated on
January 21st, the day she was violently killed

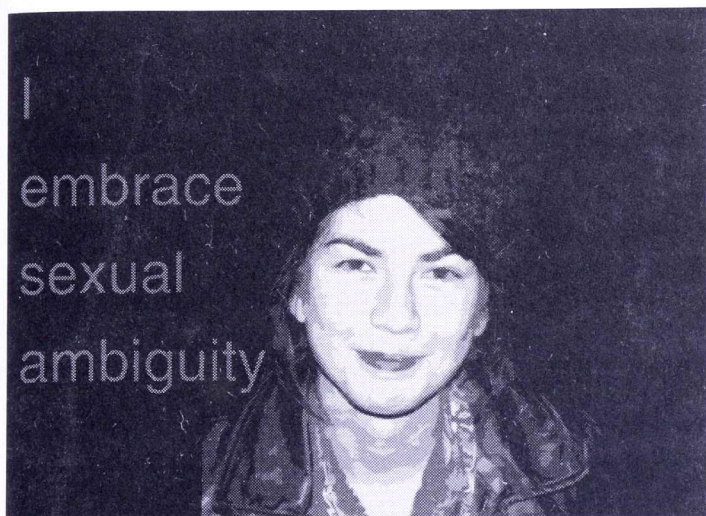
St. Dymphna: patron saint of incest victims, rape victims, the mentally ill, and those who have
suffered the loss parents; known to be synonymous with the Irish saint Davets
caduto: from Italian, translated as *fallen*

References to Handel's *Messiah* and Roman Catholic Holy Scripture



Christine

Neal Jordan



A Note to The Living.

Eric Turner

There is no Spring.

Nothing to break
the freeze,
to turn the crystals

in their thin vein-work
to water,
warmth and life.

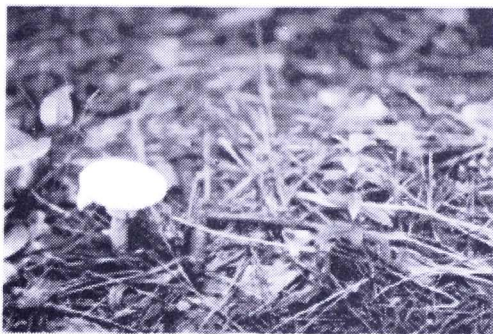
At night,
everything creaks
for the cold.

Branches explode.
A fox's breath expands
like a white balloon.



haiku

Micah Riley



Father's Words

James Greenhow, Jr.

"A place for everything and everything in its place,"
Better keep my room a tidy space.
Study my spelling, "always do the best you can,"
and do my chores "because you're the little man."
Mind my manners – "leave no food on your plate,"
brush my teeth and "you know to be in by eight."
"Remember to be thankful for each new day,"
but I "never forget to kneel and pray."

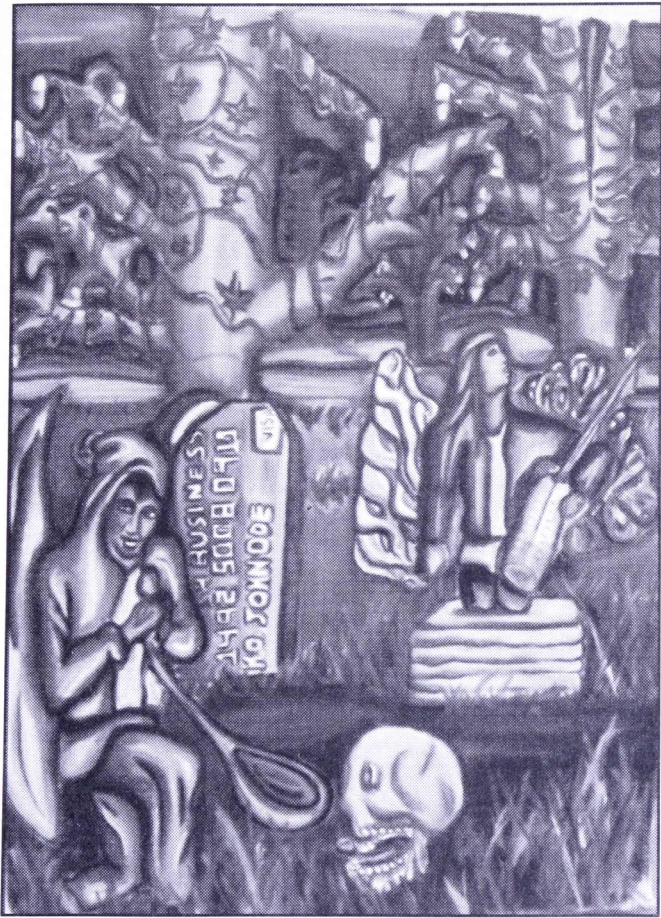
On my own, but not content –
"Things will be different when *you* pay the rent."
New on campus, "you should be head of the class,"
master the Arts, because "you have to earn a pass."
Hard at work turns boy into man –
"Earn your own way, then you'll understand."
Early to rise means I'm early to bed,
"but not until you bow your head."

Now my circle draws full reach –
"what's been learned, you too, will teach."
I pray for strength and guidance of hand,
to bring into this world *my* little man.
"Pass on the truth – he'll learn just fine,"
as my Father's words become mine.
I say, Come with me, and look upon his face,
A place for everything and everything in its place.



Credit Hell

Erin King



when you're slowly dying

Joseph Francavilla

if you think you're dying
the only solace
is the neighbor's brick-red cat
unconcerned with complaints
that just wants petting

when you're slowly dying
slow and steady doesn't
win the race

when you're mutely dying
you know death isn't
one of the unfinished symphonies —
they all are

as you're still and dying
you lie down in green pastures
without shepherds, flocks,
or color

if you know you're dying
you rest alone in vast fields
not Elysian

when you're good and dying
the rest is not silence
not rocks and stones and trees
nor sans teeth, eyes, taste
everything

as you wait while dying
you hear no swan's song
all is susurrus and haze
and gone



Manhattan Rain

Erick Richman

whispers of rain race rats
far beneath
thousand story lights
that dive from ages above
to tin can fortunes below,
and twist perceptions like skyscrapers,
averted by rainfall at the curb,
and drip down into endless tunnels
that excavate real time from gravel that was
something else long ago,
but perception today,
and reality tomorrow
and again tomorrow
and again as existence finds itself
in whispers of rain that fall as perception,
but rise as reality.



Dunk Low

LaKara M. Reed



William Carlos Williams

Chris Beyer

so much depends
upon

the red headed
rooster

beside the glazed
chickens

when the rooster
is dead

the farmer will wake up late



The Path of the Sun

Danielle Melissovas Thompson

He sleeps, I drive. The bumpy road and noisy car always lull him to sleep on long trips, and I'm amazed how the blinding sunlight never seems to bother him. I love being his wife. With his seat half reclined, he relaxes next to me on the lonely road. I notice how the sunlight plays on his features, and strikes a shining ray across his jet black hair. The glowing light dances upon his eyelashes, and warms the color of his pale face. It also highlights the dust-coated water spots on the windshield, the ones acquired since we washed the car together last weekend, in preparation for our trip.

The sun has descended a little towards the infinite horizon, as the car zooms west. My wire-rimmed sunglasses aren't quite enough to block out the blinding, golden light, but I don't really want them to. Our road stretches out like a snake, slinking up and down the rhythmic hills and valleys. Its sand-worn cracks have become the cozy homes for dandelions and other weeds. I observe that as we traverse the upsides of the hills, the sun becomes concealed from our view by vast mounds of earth; but on the downhill sides, the pavement glows, shimmering from sunlight reflecting off the tiny rocks embedded in the asphalt. Our path flickers, as if paved with gold. But this is not exactly heaven. There are always those up-hills we must climb where the sun is not allowed to reach, and the tiny rocks are not touched by its light.

With every light there is a dark; with every uphill there is a downhill.
My father's admonition keeps ringing in my mind.

Monument Valley, which I'd seen so many times while watching John Ford westerns with my father, encompasses us. The towering red cliffs, altered through years of weather, silently stand reminding us that time marches on, leaving some things the same, and some things changed forever.

"If I were a carpenter, and you were a lady, would you marry me anyway? Would you have my baby?" flows out of our radio softly, and wakes him; it's the song we played at our small wedding last month.



He yawns, "Are we there yet?"

"Almost. We just crossed the Nevada state line."

"Want me to drive for a while?"

"No, I'm okay."

With every light there is a dark; with every uphill there is a downhill.

I never knew my mother. She walked out after three months of motherhood, and my father was always bitter. I tried so hard to be different from her, or at least from his descriptions of her, so that he would never be bitter about me. Growing up as the daughter of my father's biggest regret did a number on my self-image.

I met David five years ago, when we were both eighteen, and I loved to hear him talk. That was the first thing I noticed about him. His dreams were like eagles – they inspired awe as you watched them soar. He speaks like he writes, and he writes like a poet. And I'm his muse. He writes the songs and I sing them. He told me once that I was the one person that inspired him the most, and it was because of the pain that I was strong enough to grow from. Crazy way to say I love you. And I told him that he was the brightest thing in my life, and that when I was with him I didn't care about pain. And then he proposed.

His family is idyllic...I think they were personal friends of Norman Rockwell. They are the kind of family I'd always wanted to be a part of, and leaving them in Florida was hard for both of us. But all of that is far away now, far away on the map and far away from our immediate thoughts. Two days ago, the Florida sun had carried us from our home to Oklahoma, before leaving us for the night. Yesterday, the sun didn't have a place to call home, and neither did we. But today, our triumphant third day, that sun is going to be a *California* sun, and it's all ours.

We're going to California to make a new life for ourselves, to patch together our own quilt out of the shreds of life. We're chasing that sun as fast as we can and once we get to it we're



going to hold on to it with whatever we have. Just like the two of us becoming one in our marriage, our dreams have become fused into one vision of what our life can be.

With every light there is a dark; with every uphill there is a downhill.

My father was half right; but depending on how hard you look, there can always be *more* light than dark.

We pull into a gas station about an hour outside of Vegas.

"I'll pump," he offers.

"I'm going inside for a Kit-Kat, want something?"

"Make it a double."

After 1500 miles' worth of gas stations, this one looked about the same as any other – same tarnished metal rim around the freezer doors, same angled rows of shelves, same bathroom with one bare light bulb embedded in the ceiling. I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the round surveillance mirror up in the corner – I'm a mess! My ponytail has been whipped to oblivion by the wind from the car's open windows.

As I pay for the pair of Kit-Kats, I notice a display caddy of post cards, all with pictures of the Las Vegas strip in all its incandescent glory. I pick up one of the *Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas* sign, and I get an idea.

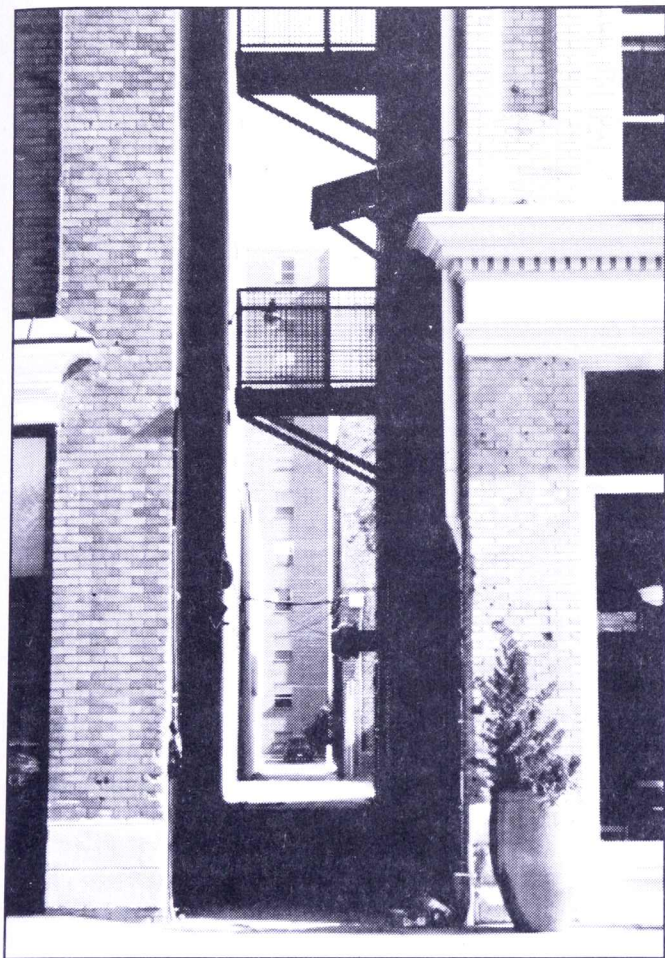
"Baby," I say, postcard in my hand, "let's take a little detour."

Right around twilight we drive past the same sign, and he reaches to hold my hand. "I love you," he says, as the last rays of the sun illuminate the Mirage.



Conduit 1

Matthew Farina



Pine-scented Air

John Summerfield

Take a swim in a babbling brook, on
the continental rift, or
melt into magma and
ooze down Roman aqueducts
past Hannibal's legions
past the Tiber
over the Dolomites -
crawl up the Alps
fall frozen in Zurich, like Swiss cheese, and
put a duck over you, to warm your top side.
Grind compounds into powder, and
call it drugs,
save a little for yourself.
Park a photo of a gorgeous brunette in the sill of a window
at the bus station in Akron, and
pretend you never saw it -
rise and fall with sunlight sometimes, and
somewhere near the lido
hide in a cave
no one else dares to enter, and
bathe in its rocks
scattering tiny sacrifices on the waves -
paint circles for drunks waiting patiently
for conveyances back to their vistas, and
maybe they say it's funny and maybe they annihilate you
like the bug you are, which is fine
because you're no longer a victim
coddling air beneath your wings, so
warn the fair-skinned cruisers
to hold their paddles forcefully
in massive bunches
channeling through the cracks -
it's funny now
her new green dress
where is written all the names -

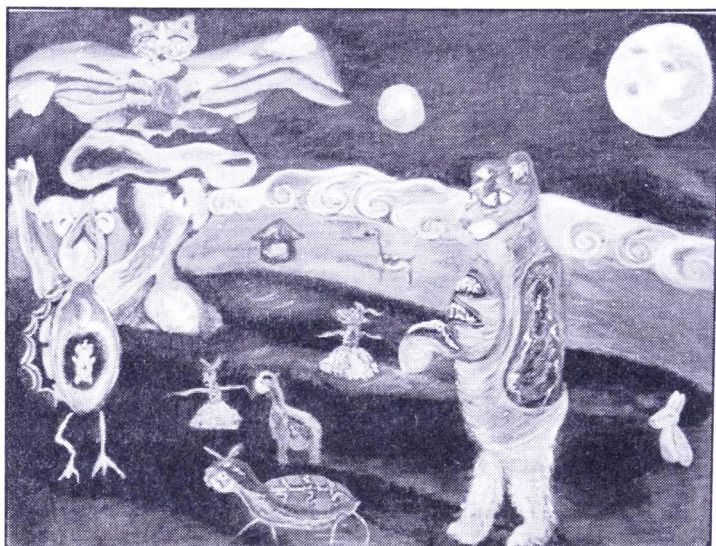


porp like a porpoise
scream with the pussy cat outside
near the garbage that smells of mackerel,
even less the mackerel
my step isn't big enough
get used to the smell of hell, of
sulphur and sout -
litter the lawn and call yourself green
a neglected brown lawn
a chopped up bread bag
a spark plug disconnected from its machine
worms from a fishing trip
choking on maggots
oil splattered on white styrofoam cups
weighing your life by a thread -
lift and sniff the weight of the earth
as it keeps its scent away from your nose -
make love on a schedule and feel guilty afterwards,
and stay pissed off at everyone, yet
expect them to drop everything
while you convulse in town square creating chaos,
the chaos you've sworn to hold a flower over
and drop the schedule for -
Mr. Neighbor pauses for a gasp of air
loads his rifle
aims at the rocks inside his garden
with funny ears like bunnies
and sprays dirt clear across the street
all because his wife stopped eating meat, and
took a job as a toilet attendant.
Now, how about that swim in the brook -



The Celebration of Animals

Christen Holloway



On the Lawn

Jarred Wiehe

Erica's eyes widened with epiphany,
A little ball of word truth from her to me:

"Oh my god, Jarred! You're in heat!
You're like a cat in heat
Standing in the front lawn
With its tail hiked up in the air going
Mraaaaawr, mraaaaawr, mraaaaawr!"

Sure, let's run with that.

I'm in need of a Fancy Feast to fill me up right
When my feline feelings keep me up at night.

So I slink over to your place like a little lion with pride
Swelling in my chest. I'll arch my back, and curl up by your side.

We'll paw at each other, pressing fur to fur.
No time to play coy; make me purr.

And we'll fling fie in the face of the scowling Bob Barker
As we caterwaul in the alleyway, crying "Harder, harder!"

Slamming into trashcans, melting man, woman, cat—
The night revels in our cries, "Yeah, just like that!"

So certainly she's right. I am like a cat in heat.
My number is 706-555-0752, if you desire to meet.



not what you'd call a lady

Anna Dunson

I shifted in my hosiery skin
cross. uncross.
crossing uncrossing Leggs as limbs

matching only to match again
dirt footed stockings to the
heel and ball
change.
heel and ball
of my flesh toned ivory feet

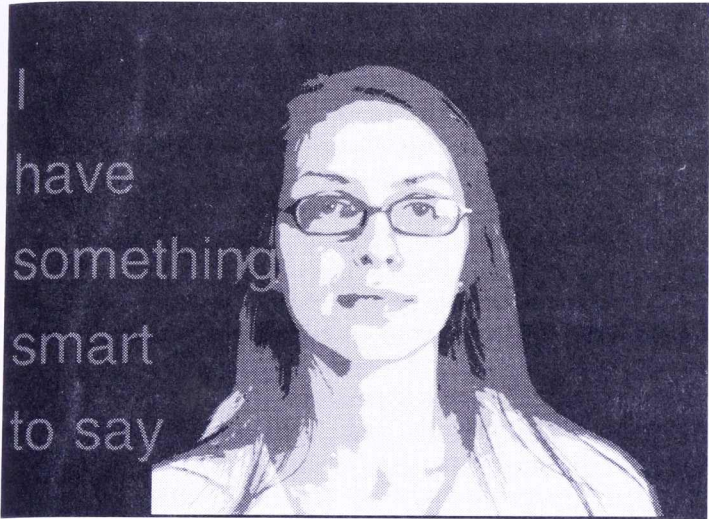
with today's-only-means-of-control top pantyhose
cutting into my un-loved handles
and patent leather lolitas
dragging beneath fallen arches

I'm not what you'd call a lady,
yet he calls me just that.



Gina

Neal Jordan



Evil Contained

Danielle Melissovas Thompson

Acres of pine trees. Nothing but acres of pine trees. And fog, she observed while she yawned; the coffee she had bought sixty miles back had started to wear off. That was sixty miles ago, and for the last fifty-nine, the mountain road had not revealed anything remotely resembling a store or business. And the key word here was *remote*. On one side of the road were the last languishing rays of a retreating sun. On the other side were those skinny pine trees. In the distances of the woods, their limbs blurred and matted with each other until there was no longer any definition between them, just grey mistiness. And then it started to snow.

She had enjoyed the time spent at the annual family reunion in Chattanooga, but now was content to return to daily life in Atlanta and catch up on some work. Driving on, she noticed deposits of snow along the edges of the road and a light dusting on the ground that continued back into that matted grayness of the woods. Her car approached a rusting green metal bridge that crossed above the road. As the white Mazda passed under the bridge – “Clack-clack-clack-clack!,” a train as rusty as the bridge it traveled on rushed over her head, startling her and causing her hand to fly off the stick shift and knock her empty twelve ounce 7-11 styrofoam coffee cup into the floorboard. She internally groaned at her sudden loss of composure.

The snow was starting to get heavier. And the sky was darker, much darker. In fact, it seemed as if she had come out from under the bridge and it was thirty minutes later. “Maybe it just looks that way because of the trees,” she thought.

There was a sharp bend in the road just ahead, and as she pressed her foot onto the brake pedal to slow the fifty-five mph car, her road-weary tires began to slide on the ice. She frantically pressed the pedal again and again, but the car only gained speed across the surface of the unseen hazard. She braced herself and tried to steer the car to match the curve of the road, but the patches of snow on the road thwarted her efforts. Her car raced toward – a pine tree.



She really hated having to get out into the cold to survey the damage, but knew she had to. She looked at her cell-phone to see if by some chance she had service in the North Georgia Mountains. There was no service right now, but the occasional bar would dance teasingly on the screen and then disappear. "At least there's hope," she thought. She wanted to take pictures of the car's damages, so she reached into the travel bag behind her seat and felt for the pocket where she had stored her camera. As she walked around to the front of her car, wrapping her scarf tighter around her neck and chin, she noticed what was around that unfortunate curve. The repressed photographer in her walked towards the sight, hoping to get a few shots. It was a small family cemetery, surrounded by a short rusty metal fence. As annoyed as she was at the cold and the condition of her car, she decided it wouldn't hurt to take a few of those "artistic" shots she missed having the time to take.

After turning on the emergency flashers, locking the car, and pocketing her cell-phone, she approached the cemetery gate, hoping to use whatever rays of sunlight were left on the horizon. She gingerly lifted the latch on the rusty gate, and it broke off in her hand. After realizing there was no way to reattach it, she gently laid it in the snow, and in effect, aided the dilapidation process a little. She opened the gate even more gingerly, hoping it too wouldn't fall to its demise.

She walked around the edges of the family plot, which was about fifty feet by fifty feet in her estimation. There was nothing past the four borders of the fences other than pine trees. She noticed that the last name on all of the tombstones was *Taylor*. Then she saw a starting point for her photography: an old and ornate headstone, half blackened by moss. She got down on one knee in the snow to take the picture from a low angle. Next, she meandered toward a sculpture in the middle of the cemetery, being careful not to step directly on top of any of the graves, as she was once warned by her grandfather as a respect for the dead.

A few photographs later, her trail of footsteps in the



snow led to an above ground tomb-like structure that was badly cracked and weather-worn, and whose lid was shifted partially out of its original resting place. Unbeknownst to her, her cell-phone had also started to shift out of her pocket the many times she crouched down to take pictures, and was now only centimeters from falling out entirely. She stood beside the tomb reading the inscription, and when she turned her body, the cell-phone brushed the stone and slipped out. It fell directly into the partially-open tomb. The opening was wide enough for her to reach in and retrieve the phone, but this was a thought she didn't like dwelling on for too long. Since she didn't have a flashlight, she held her camera over the opening and took a picture with the flash on. Then she switched the camera over to view mode. She blinked, twice. Was that really there in the photo? Or was it just a shadow made from the flash? She took another couple of photos just to make sure. Her original instinct hadn't failed her – it was a staircase.

Unfortunately her cell-phone was nowhere visible in the photographs. But her curiosity now extended beyond finding the lost gadget. A staircase in the middle of a cemetery? Going underground? Dare she?

She was never one for weighing options too heavily before making a decision, and in this case she rationalized the descent in order to find the cell-phone, which she badly needed, especially since she hadn't seen another car on the road in over an hour. Taking one more look around her surroundings, she pushed the lid away from her a few feet to have enough room to climb down. At this point common sense was beginning to make its revival, so she thought to herself, "I'll just go down far enough to get my phone, and then I'll be out."

She planted her feet firmly and then took several more photos around her feet to get a map of where to take her steps. The stone steps seemed surprisingly clean to her. She flashed the camera several more times in front of her as she took a couple more steps. "Thank goodness for digital pictures," she mused.



After a few more steps and several more flashes, she looked up in front of her, and nearly dropped the camera during her reaction.

“A candle?” She looked back above her. She wasn’t as far down as she thought she was. And the out-of-place light source was only a few yards away. She knew she’d regret it if she didn’t go on.

As she followed the curved wall around, she finally saw her lost object lying at the base of a stone platform, and on top of the platform was the burning candle. It was a large, round candle, and at its base were thick puddles of dried wax. She noticed a small alcove in the stone wall above the candle. Stepping closer to get a better look, she saw a glimmer of—

“Hold it right there!” She turned around just in time to see and hear a double-barrel shotgun engage. And the bearer of it looked even less comforting. She was an old woman with wiry grey hair that fell in frizzy tendrils around her haggard face. In addition to a heavy work-coat, she wore a dress that came down to her ankles, an apron with a tiny floral print, and thick snow boots. But all the attention was on that shotgun, which was now pointed directly at the girl.

“You shouldn’t ‘of come here!” The old woman reprimanded.

“I-I dropped my phone,” the girl said as she held it out in her right hand for the woman to examine, “and it bounced all the way over here!”

“Did ya touch it?” the woman said, gesturing with the tip of her shotgun to the unknown glimmering object in the wall.

“No, I just looked at it,” the girl pleaded. “What...what is it?” she dared to ask.

The old woman looked past her towards the object in the alcove, and seemed to contemplate responding. Then she lowered the shotgun, and looked back at the girl’s eyes.

“If I don’t tell you, you’ll never be able to get it out of your mind. I know yer type,” said the old woman perceptively. She leaned the shotgun against the corridor wall and walked



toward the platform. As the woman approached the candlelight, which was now dancing excitedly because of all the commotion, the girl could better see the features of her face. The deep wrinkles in her forehead were made even more defined by the cautious expression she now wore. She reached her gloved hands into the alcove, released a heavy sigh, and brought the object out into the light. It was a box.

The girl had never seen anything like it, except maybe in pictures of the crown jewels in the Tower of London. The box was no larger than a jewelry box, only the jewelry appeared to be on the outside. The dancing candlelight was reflected in the multiple facets of the rubies, sapphires, and topaz of the box. Its edges were gilded and encrusted with emeralds.

Entranced, the girl involuntarily reached her hand out to touch the box, but the old woman quickly pulled it back from her. "Be careful!" she scolded. The girl snapped out of her enchantment, but without taking her eyes from the box she asked, "Is this yours?"

"I hate thinkin' of it that way," the woman replied.

"This-this is amazing! It's beautiful! If it's real, it should be in a museum somewhere. Do you know how much this must be worth?" the girl gushed.

"First of all, it's real enough, and all it's worth is to be shut away and never looked at! Do you realize what's inside?"

The girl stared at her inquisitively, as it was impossible for her to guess the answer.

"This...this is Pandora's Box."

The girl wondered if she had heard her right. Maybe she had, and maybe this was just some crazy old mountain lady. But if that were the case, where did she get such a magnificent box?

"It must never be opened, but it must always have a caretaker to protect it," the woman continued. "The Box is just a box as long as it stays closed, but if it was ever opened...well I don't want to think about that." With that she hastily and carefully placed the box back into its alcove.



A thousand questions raced through the girl's mind, and the first to make its way out was: "Where did you get it?"

"I found it, with a note, some kind of a...scroll. It had hundreds of signatures on it, and many of the first ones were in letters and languages I didn't recognize. At the bottom it said: WE ARE THE KEEPERS OF THE BOX. WE SWEAR NEVER TO OPEN IT, AND THUS PROTECT THE WORLD FROM UNKNOWN EVILS. For centuries the box has been kept safe under somebody's watch, and for sixty-eight years, it's been in my watch. I haven't shown it to anyone...until now, of course. I didn't want to risk it bein' opened for any reason."

The girl felt a little sheepish after that. She had never heard anything so unbelievable, incredible, yet she believed it. After a few seconds she asked, "Have you ever wondered—"

"Ever' damn day. That's why it helps if I don't think of it as mine. As long as I just try to forget it's here as best I can, everything is alright. And don't think I haven't wondered if it was all a hoax, just like you're wonderin' now. But then I think, what if it ain't?"

A shudder ran up the spines of both women, blue eyes staring into blue eyes. Next, the girl asked, "Why do you think it's so beautiful? I mean, if it really does hold...evil...why all the jewels?"

"That's the nature of evil. It always looks attractive; otherwise it wouldn't be so tempting."

"What are you going to do with it, you know, after your time as caretaker is done?"

"Let someone else find it, I s'ppose. I could never ask someone to carry its weight." Immediately the gravity of that statement began to sink into the girl.

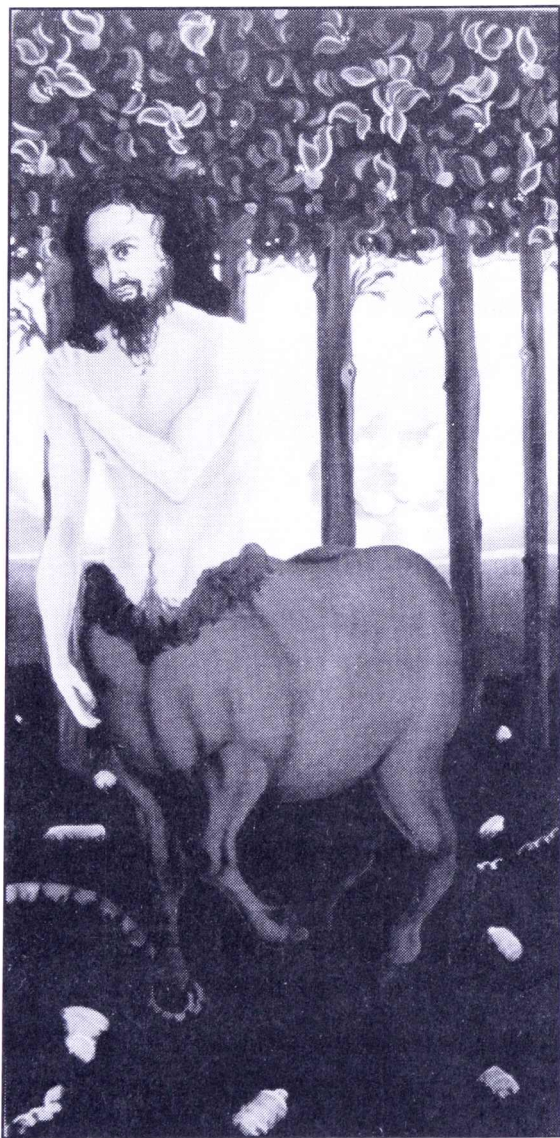
"It's getting dark up there. I saw your car; you can use the phone in the house to call someone," the woman said, turning her eyes to the now-dead cell-phone still in the girl's hand. As the woman led the way out of the corridor, the girl quickly seized her opportunity for one last photo. She surreptitiously snapped a pic-

ture of the box, the flash illuminating the dark alcove.

A few days later, safe and warm back at her Atlanta studio apartment, the girl decided to download all of those photographs onto her computer. She hadn't looked at them until now. She saw the artistic photos of the gravestones; the many, many pictures of the stairs in the corridor; and then she saw the one she thought she would treasure most. It was the one of the box. Something looked strange in one corner of the photograph, so she zoomed in to get a closer look.

The lid was shifted out of place.





Estate Sale

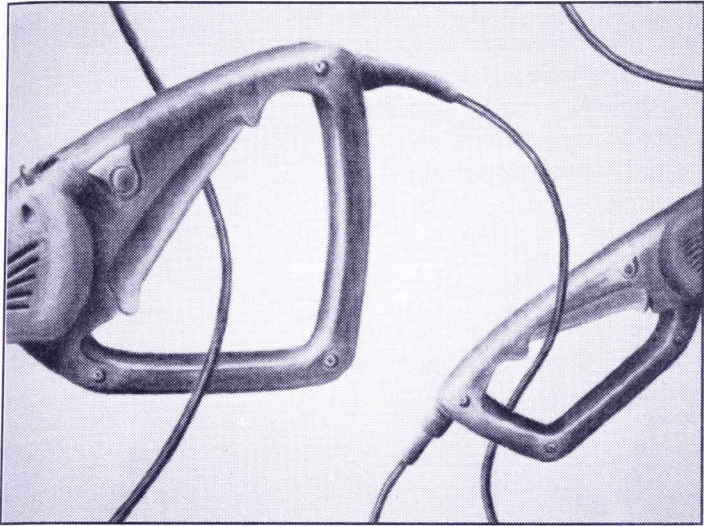
Crystal Jenkins Woods

Those who had visited before
were put off by the lack of staging,
by the strangers trampling her life,
all the things her son didn't come for
in exactly the places she'd left them:
mantles sagging with dusty frames,
three years of *Good Housekeeping*
sliding from baskets by the chaise,
plates stacked in cupboards,
one dining room chair angled out
where she'd risen from supper
or breakfast or lunch,
a constellation of costume jewelry
glittering against a dark dresser,
stool softener by the sink.

I, who didn't know her
lingered over an Oriental tea set
splashed with cobalt and gold.
"Her son brought it back,"
someone said, but not from where,
or why her thumb had not rubbed
white even one gold handle.

That very tea set graces my kitchen now
untouched by me as by her
except once, the day I bought it,
when on the last sip of oolong I noticed
stamped inside the bottom of my cup
the faint bust of a geisha,
expression corpselike, makeup thick
and funereal. How that bone
china trembled against my lips.





Variety hours

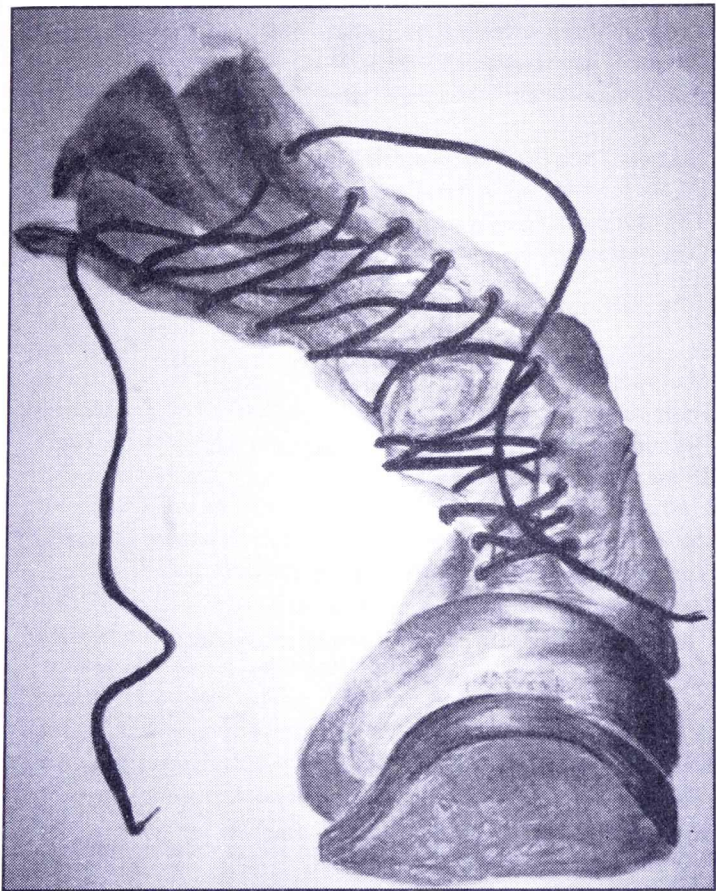
Anna Dunson

Motown openings
spurred taps on the shoulders of
the she to my left with rolling eyes
because I knew she knew I thought you
while the thick banged she's name
smeared neon in pink lemonade lights
Questions as piano-keyed answers
ladled my sugar water dissolve
which I feared inevitable if
that song
ended with
those lyrics,
and it did
here, she sang my conclusion, simply
I nodded, chest clutched and knees syncopated
as the she to my right said,
“we don’t dance we fidget.”



Weathered and Aged

Anna Alder



How Many Poets Does It Take...

Danielle Meslissovas Thompson

I dedicate this poem to all English majors

My sweet, I haven't a mind for rhymes,
I've never been smitten with rhythm,
I'm not acquiescent to alliteration,
And similes are like strangers to me.

No poet I am, but I know *five* who are,
I'll ask for their aid in my poem to you,
The canon can surely prove my point well,
(They owe me a favor, I think this will do).

I.

Marlowe, when not being devilish,
Promised pleasures to his shepherdess,
Beauties of nature, roses and doves,
If she would come and be his love.

But he could pledge delights alone,
Views and vistas she could find on her own,
He never once mentioned joys of the sort
That won't wither and die when beauty falls short.

II.

Herrick on the other hand,
Keenly saw how time could fly;
Warning the virgins to make much of time
While sand is plenty and sun is high.

The buds they gathered have withered now,
Yet withering buds will not cause our gloom,
We still have time to gather those joys, for
Happiness lasts, and by the dooryard blooms.



III.

Sweet Afton Water, how my spirit Burns,
Desiring to bring my dear love to your turns;
Could you do for him, as for those long before,
And let my sweet love lie down by your shore?

Forgive me, but Afton, you're only a stream,
'Till my love comes near you and lies down to
dream,
Your glassy waters meet my steady gaze,
And his ruddy cheek meets the sun's golden rays.

IV.

Consider a moment, the chess Lytton played,
(Before he'd grown so sadly wise,)
To capture a king was never his aim.
Though we know not who won,
His strategy indeed could overcome;
His love's dear heart was his true prize.

Make *your* move now, dear lover,
Let us play chess as they did before,
Glancing from pawn to knight to each other;
Tell me you too haven't grown sadly wise?
Still foolish enough to play for a prize –
The queen in check on the opposite side of the board.

V.

Eight lines were enough
For Ms. Teasdale's relay
Of the strength of one look
From Colin that day.



His kiss touched not her skin,
Yet she felt it night and day;
I understand it perfectly
When you look at me that way.

Marlowe makes promises,
Herrick makes haste,
Burns' talks of Afton,
And Lytton of games,
Ms. Teasdale tells of a kiss from the eyes,
To this list I'll add just a few meager lines:

(Forgive me, for I can't make them rhyme
Or glide or sing like the poets could;
Here goes –)

Your soft grey sweater, your beckoning smile,
Your laugh I can hear over all conversations,
Your clever eyes, giving me kisses all the time,
And most of all, your sweet, comforting soul.



From the trees down

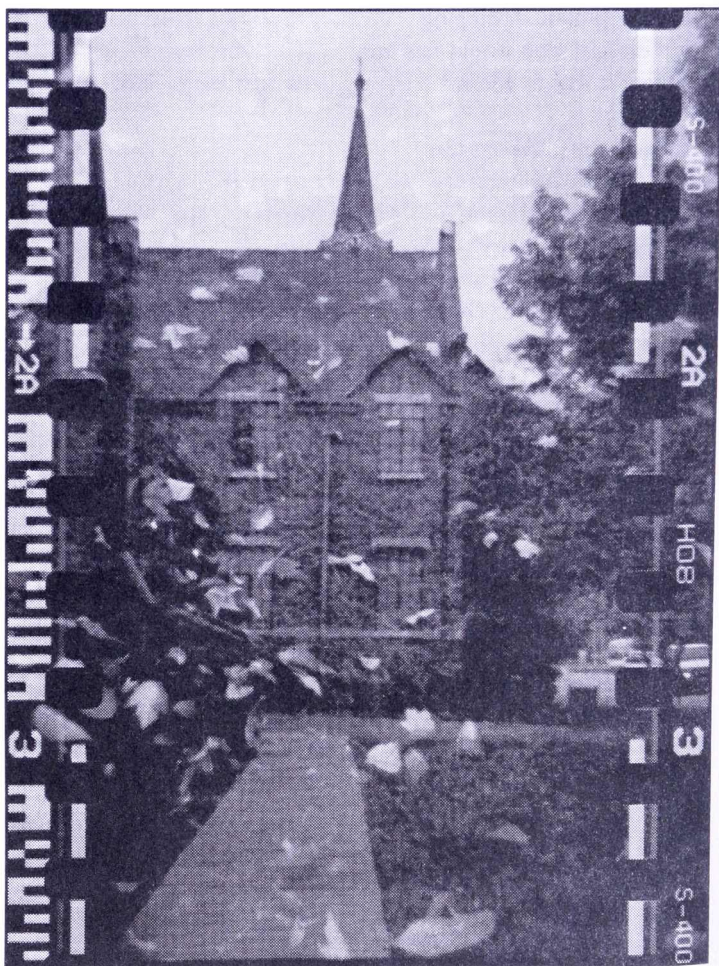
Anna Dunson

She bound her flight against her back
such a dogmatic dewinging
for a birdgirl who would fain run
thinking it was freedom
To follow
I earthed my perching feet
weighting the hollows
of each feathered bone
with silvered mercury
Our dissected tongues tripped
my marco your polo chirps
that went swallowed behind
the 40,000 digesting flies
that promised reunion
We were left to only hum.



Autumn kirk

Matthew Farina



Notes Toward a Failed Theory

Scott Wilkerson

Thank you for this sonnet, which I regard
as evidence of the good will between us
and more than merely suggestive of
the strangeness developing around here.
I used to believe the logical positivists were converging
onto something determinate, a real insight
into the structure of the given world;
now, I'm not so sure. This is why
I am mixing milk with my algebra and
faith with formalism; but the truth, if any remains,
is off the record, a mélange of texture and gesture,
a syncopated wiggle of providential fat.

P.S. The view from the couplet is good
and gathers us toward its faltering light.



Air Pegasus

LaKara M. Reed



To the Poets of Color

Kristin Taylor

have read of the moment
when you were a child
who still thought
skin-dye could run
in dark pools down a drain,
scrubbed in bathwater
with washcloth and soap,
clawed at skin until it ripped
like paper made thin
from too much erasing.

I am white. I cannot know
what it means not to be.
I know only that I want
to scrub my skin red,
bruise it black,
brown,
yellow,
wash your blood
from my hands, return it
to your veins. I know
only that my words
are insufficient, that
they leave you empty,
but they are all I have.



tunnel 13

Neal Jordan



Spittin' into the Wind

Nancy Moore

I was approaching 58 when I first realized I was old. Not getting old. Old. The geriatric crowd at the Piccadilly may not have considered me such but to the 18 year olds in my Freshman Composition class, I was ancient. After all, I had steel gray hair that I refused to dye and wore shoes for comfort rather than style. Besides, did these post-pubescents even know anyone like me other than grandparents? Even their parents were often younger than I was.

My epiphany presented itself at the close of an English 1101 class I had just finished teaching. Amidst the rustle of books and papers being gathered, students scrambling like rats for the safety of the outside corridor, one student rushed toward my desk, anxious to ask a question. Nothing unusual about this; however, her queries were unusual or at least, unexpected by me.

Jolene, for that was her name, pronounced with a deep Southern drawl in which both syllables are held longer than expected. Because an extended pause existed between the two syllables, the result was something like...“Joe – Leeceen.” In any case, Jolene rushed forward to catch me before I, too, could escape. She was dressed totally in pink: pink top, pink shorts, pink tennis shoes; even her toenails were pink. Pink may have been her calling card but perky was her signature. In fact, she was so perky it occurred to me how pleasant it would be to put my freshly sharpened grading pencil through her eye.

Fortunately this thought was only a fantasy and my more mature self took over. “How may I help you, Jooooo (pause) leeceen?” She seemed to lose her ever-present smile and her face grew serious.

Could it be? My heart lightened and I began to smile with the possibility of hope. Could I have finally reached a student who now comes to me for further insight into the nature of a character or an extended explanation about Faulkner's use of stream-of-consciousness? Could I, like Anne Sullivan for Helen Keller, be the catalyst to open the doors of language usage and communication for my own student?



My heart began to race. Moments like this are rare for teachers, and I knew my time had come. Long years of academia prepares professors for the time when our students, like those of Plato or Aristotle, will seek our help and advice, thirsty for knowledge.

I grew alert, excited, attentive (had I been a dog, my tail would have wagged and my ears stood up). Then Jolene spoke. "Dr. Moore, ah, well, I wasn't here Monday because my hair wouldn't 'do' right." (Giant pause on her part.... chagrin on mine.) Suddenly I notice that she has paused simply to shift her bubblegum, also pink, from one side of her mouth to the other side. However, Jolene continues while rocking her books back and forth and glancing from me to the door....from the door to me. "What I want to know is, well, did y'all do anything important?" Perky Smile.

It was my time to pause. My first inclination was to answer, "No, Jo-ooo-leeen. We didn't do anything important. We played Parcheesi all day." The problem with this: #1. The response would have been rude (rude is not my style although I could learn to enjoy sarcastic), and #2. Jolene may have believed me (which was quite possible), and most likely, #3. pink lady would have had zero idea about what I was speaking (having never heard of Parcheesi either because she knew nothing about games that didn't use buttons or because she never encountered a crossword puzzle). Both reasons appeared quite plausible. An added hurdle would be that IF Jolene did, in fact, not know the word "Parcheesi," I was quite sure she would also lack the necessary drive to seek out its definition.

Instead, with my arms by my side and my cheek flat on the desktop in an attitude of abject surrender, I mumbled, "Check your syllabus." When she responded with "But I can't find my....," I simply raised my right hand, fingers fanned outward, palm facing Jolene and said, "Don't speak."





Pork Rinds & Beer

Danielle Melissovas Thompson

his hand rested on the conveyor belt,
ready to hand over a five and a one.

the blue ink on the Amstel packaging
painted an icy cool picture in his mind.

a gold tooth peeked out from under
chapped lips when he yawned at the ceiling.

the cashier busily went through the motions,
waiting for his shift to end, hoping for a promotion.

the greasy pork rinds rested patiently atop the 12-pack,
so much liquid for one body.

the hole in his red shirt revealed a frame, thin,
and hungry, perhaps. Pork rinds will satisfy.

I bagged my fruit and dairy, stacked them in my cart,
Waited to swipe my card.

I saw him, he saw me seeing him;
Did he feel shame at the beer and pork rinds?

I saw his evening, I thought. Washing away
His lost hopes, sitting outside, under a tree, in the park.

Should I have reached out, should I have told him
someone loves him, someone named Jesus?

or would that have been to forward?

Someone gave him money, and he put that



Down on pork rinds and beer.

What if someone had given him love,
Would that have gone down on eternity?



Untitled

Katarina Garcia



Deadly Interstate

Emily Stranger

Swallowtail
butterflies flutter across
Interstate 17, their blood heated
by the spring sunshine.
I can't avoid hitting them.
One delicate body
after another
after another
explodes against my windshield.
In my rearview mirror I
watch their shattered wings
drift towards the Georgia asphalt
like dead leaves in autumn.



Textures

Danielle Melissovas Thompson



Our Astrospheric Dance

Erick Richman

The Sun does not set in your eyes,
as the Moon does not wane in mine.
But the solar you swell each day,
the lunar I glow each night,
because our bodies dance stellar, not
as the torchlit Sun, far away
from the moon; not their inane step,
their void dance of detached rhythm,
but our own timeless writhing in
distances of slick-scented skin
that curve satin in the astrosphere.
Let us dance our bodies stellar, our way,
Let the Sun and Moon dance apart
Let them envy our climactic orbit.



Watching

Rosanne Tempesta

All I heard was her scream. It wasn't piercing, or anything like that, but a sick moaning that seemed to crawl its way into a throaty scream. It was out of place on a warm spring day. I tried to explain to the two policemen what I thought happened, but they had already looked past me. I was an aged woman with wrinkled flesh and clouded eyes. I tried to follow them into the basement to explain how I found my upstairs neighbor there like that – heaped over her son's small body, screaming and screaming, then choking, and finally vomiting all over the cellar floor.

"She must have had a hard time figuring out what happened." I stopped midway down the basement stairs in an effort to steady my weak legs. I also wanted a moment to collect myself. "The lighting down here is poor," I explained to the taller cop, the one without much hair. He stood firmly on the bottom landing, his back to the open doorway. He had wrinkles about his eyes that were asymmetrical, like he squinted with one eye more open than the other. I continued, "She must have realized that Ben was dead, and then she just broke down." The second policeman, who had been on the top landing, wasn't really listening to me either, but continued to look up and down our block on the lower west side of Manhattan. He had an intense look on his face – a murder in New York City wasn't rare, but it was unlikely in our neighborhood. The fact that the victim was an eight-year-old boy only amplified everyone's agitation and sadness.

I tried to talk faster, explaining about the man I had seen across the street earlier that morning. "He was leaning on the wall near the corner store," I began. "He was white, about thirty or so. I could tell he was tall, about 6 feet at least," I said. "Perhaps not that tall, but definitely not short. He had long legs. Usually long-legged people are quite tall, as you know." The taller officer nodded his head. I figured that they would ask me more questions, but they told me that many people were in and out of the corner store that morning. They would check the security video. Then they uttered, "Thanks."

The two men talked to each other while I turned and climbed the cement steps back to street level and then made



the ascent into the apartment building. Before opening up the door with the smudged glass window, I glanced to my right and looked into my own front room. The side window of my apartment, my connection with the neighborhood all these years, was where I watched people come and go – especially Ben and his mother.

Since my husband died, I'd been lonely. I tried to find company in television, but news depressed me, history specials bored me and most everything else was melodramatic. I would rather watch what was happening outside my apartment house than what was on television. People that walked the city streets were much more fascinating.

I walked over to the front window again and looked out. The two policemen stood side by side on the sidewalk, gazing down into the dark basement that would soon be lit by the investigators harsh bulbs. The work lights hung throughout the night from the pipes that lined the ceiling. The mini-generator shook the sidewalk; the orange and black cords emerged from it, twisted and slithered down the steps, powering the illumination that must have made the boy's pinkish skin stark white, save for the blood and bruises. The police had taped off the steps, but many people came like hypnotized moths towards light. They went through the propped- open gray basement door, creating shadows that moved over the walls of the building.

I was drawn to the light too. I made another trip outside that warm evening and looked down the stairs. While I steadied myself with my cane, I wondered where the roaches hid and what color the back wall of the basement was. I had not ventured back that far, not ever.

"Morning Ellie. Time for your medication." My favorite nurse's voice broke my concentration.

"Hello. I wasn't sleeping Janice, just thinking with my eyes closed."

"Oh yeah, that's a good one." Janice ended her sentence with a giggle and poured me water from the blue plastic pitcher on the end table into a paper cup. The pills were



already in the other cup. She shook them around a bit making small circles with the cup, mimicking a magician with a magic potion while she handed the cup to me.

"Janice, you are my favorite nurse," I said. "Your sense of humor is what we need around here." I mumbled a thank you, took the water, and swallowed my pills.

"Someone will be back to help dress you, pretty lady. So don't go back to sleep," Janice warned as she left the room.

I turned towards the empty bed next to me. Someone else will move in soon, they always do. I thought back to the journey that ended with me lying on the plastic covered mattress beneath me. After Ben was murdered, my daughter Kate insisted I move to an assisted living complex, but then the fall and broken hip changed all of that. Temporary rehab turned into a permanent room on another floor of the same facility. I knew that I was lucky that I had not yet lost my mind, like some of the other residents, but then I wondered if that would be easier. I might be able to forget. I shut my eyes against the morning light.

The day Ben died, I saw him run down the steps, his brown hair flopping about and his smile large. I had been sitting at the window with my coffee, then decided to go and dress for the day. I could still dress myself back then, even though it was a chore and took a while. After I dressed, I poured myself a fresh cup of coffee and went back to the window, sitting close to it in an effort to see the boy fly down the street on his bike. I leaned toward the screen and breathed in the spring air as I sought out the green shirt I caught a glimpse of on his way down the stairs. He never rode by the front of the building. I heard the moaning, then the screaming. I got up and moved my tired body down the stairs as quickly as I could.

I still wake up dreaming about it. It fills my mind at every opportunity, although I almost never give it permission. It is there anyway...images that haunt me during the day – day-dreaming, but not in a good way. Once I asked Amy, the "therapist" about it. I asked her why there isn't word for day-



dreams that are nightmares. She looked at me like I was crazy.

"Ellie, there is no word for that," Amy replied.

There is no word, no word.

Amy doesn't seem to have many answers. She often responds to my questions with more questions, which infuriates me. Our meetings take place once a week now, but at first we met twice a week. That was because I was depressed, according to Kate and the doctors. Who would not be, after what I had seen.

Every time it comes back to me, I get nauseous. Sometimes it is a mild nausea, other times I cannot eat. They were a mess, both mother and son. The mother, face smeared with tears and dirt and blood. The boy was bloody and swollen around the face. His hair was mussed and his clothes disheveled. If I had not known what pants he had on, I might not have recognized him.

Jeans torn on the right knee; pinkish-white skin showing through. The same skin that I would see poking through when he would sit back on his too-big sneakers at the bottom of the stairs of our apartment building, where the broken step is. Rolling Matchbox cars back and forth-back and forth.

In warmer weather, I'd hear him through the screen. He would be talking to himself, playing with his toys on the steps. His mother would be sitting on the top of the stairs and looking at a magazine. She would look up and ask, "What Ben?" and he would singsong, "Just playing. Talking to myself." I would smile then, envious of the uncomplicated bond between them. It was so different than my relationship with my own daughter, who demanded so much from me. Even when she was as young as the boy, she was never content to just play and talk to herself; she needed me, wanted my full attention. I was content to watch her play. Kate was never content. She often demanded, "Come. Come here, by me. Right here." And she would pat the carpet beside her.

I would sometimes complain to my late husband when he came home at night and asked how our day went. He would laugh, hug me close and say, "Katie can't help being who she

is. She just loves you, is all.” It never felt like love to me. “She would take my blood if I let her,” I would retort.

His blood was smeared all over his green shirt that day. Watching him was over. I missed seeing his mouth form a slight smile when he would see me studying him from my apartment window. Sweet boy that he was. That day – the day his pinkish-white flesh screamed at me through his torn jeans, slow tears slid along the lines of my age-worn cheek. For days, more tears would follow and like tiny streams move along the creases of my skin. I sometimes became too weary to wipe them away. Every now and then I would look in the mirror, a thing I avoided since I often did not recognize the woman who gazed back at me. She was weary with silvery wisps of hair. I would see tear stains on her crumpled face. They reminded me of the ones Kate used to have when she would neglect to wash her face after a hard cry. Everything was a drama to her – everything. She is still like that.

The police were in there a long time that day. They were all over the place and up and down the block for the weeks that followed. Everyone hoped they would find who murdered Ben. The police focused on the people he knew: his babysitters, the neighbors and even his father. I knew better. The blond man with eyebrows so white he looked old at first glance would never hurt his child. One Saturday morning about two years ago he picked Ben up for one of their every-other-weekend visits. The thin man let Ben climb up on his back and he carried him down the stairs neighing and galloping like a horse. I had stopped at the bottom of the stairs to wait to begin the harsh climb and to watch them in their second of joy. When Ben’s father reached the sidewalk, he bumped into my cane because he was squinting into the sun and did not see me. He had a surprised look on his face, like I came out of nowhere. But then he mumbled an apology. In the dark the next evening, the happy horse turned into a tired father, cradling the small sleepy boy as he trudged back through the paint-chipped front door. The boy’s legs curled up like a baby’s, even though he must have been about five back then. I had pushed the curtains back a bit and stopped watching only

when the sad looking man exited and I knew the boy was safely home with his mother.

Those days I watched intently. I had noticed the small things: the way Ben's pretty mother's ponytail would sway back and forth when she walked down the street with his little hand in hers, or the joy on their faces when it snowed and their mouths opened to taste the snowflakes.

After Ben died, the neighborhood was a frenzy of activity, but with every passing day, the neighborhood bustled less and less. Finally, there was one day when not one police officer came and no one went back down there. And when his mom finally came back, it was just to get their belongings and leave for good. Ben's clothing peeking out at me through the space between the dark cavern and the trunk lid that were tied together. I sometimes wonder what she did with his clothes. She might have kept some, just to smell once in a while. I would have kept his Giants sweatshirt. It was the one item he wore almost every day the fall he learned to ride his bicycle.

The little bike had been left for trash. No one could blame her for that. It was a good thing that someone had seized it out of the pile she left there the day she moved out for good. I was glad for that, as it was two full days before trash pickup came through the neighborhood again. It would have been unbearable to see that green and black bike covered by other things, but visible enough from my window. He had gone down to the basement to get the little bike. He'd grab his bike and roll it up the slanted cement space that was on the right side of the steps, while climbing the stairs next to it.

His mom seemed relieved when he graduated from a tricycle to a bicycle. Before that she had to go down the basement to take hold of his tricycle and take it up to the street for him. I'd see her dragging it up the steps, bumping it into her jeaned legs. Those days, she would stay outside with him. With the bicycle, she could leave her apartment window open and hang over the edge every few minutes to check on him. I wonder if she knew I was watching most of the time anyway.

"Ben!" She would yell down to him. "Look at you – riding all by yourself."



"Watch, Mommy, watch," he would call back as he rode back and forth.

My window overlooks the parking lot and I am sitting watching people come and go. I see family members with drained looks on their faces even before they enter the front doors of this place. I see a young girl walking slowly towards her car and she is crying. She opens her door, slides in and just sits there for a while. I think I hear her sobbing. She leans out to take hold of the door and slowly closes it. Then she drives off. I think back to Ben's mother and her sorrow. Her wailing. Her tears. My tears.

I notice two little boys walking across the parking lot with a woman. She is looking down at the smaller boy as she holds his little hand and balances a flowering plant in her other hand. They are all walking towards the home. The taller boy looks familiar to me. He looks up, sees me at the window and waves. He says something to the woman. I wave back. I realize that it is Kate and her boys. She lifts her face toward my window and smiles. I see her father in her and I smile too. By the time they get to my room I am no longer crying. The false lilting of Kate's voice annoys me, but I say how nice of you to visit. I shuffle over to my nightstand and find some hard candy to offer my grandsons.

Kate begins to flit around the room, straightening out my things and filling the air with nonsense. I look out my window in an effort to avoid watching her. Then something she says catches my attention.

I turn towards the room and ask her what she said.

"Mother, they got the guy who killed that little boy."

"Ben, his name was Ben." I remind her. "How do you know this?"

She opens her purse and hands me an article she clipped from the paper. Her handwriting across the top reveals the date.

"Last week," I mutter to myself as I sit down in my chair, adjust my eyeglasses and begin to scan the article. There is no picture of the man and I am glad for that. I do not need



a clearer, more recent memory of his face. I learn that he was arrested in Connecticut after assaulting and murdering another child. Evidence from that crime connected him to Ben's death.

I breathe in slowly and allow some peace to bathe me.

"Good." I say as I look up. My daughter is watching me. Her face is tentative, but hopeful. For a moment, she is a small girl again needing me to reassure her.

She reaches out and squeezes my hand that is not holding the clipping. I allow her to hold my hand for a while. We are quiet, but my bed is droning as it goes up and down. My grandsons are giving each other rides. I slide my chair away from the window and sit down facing them. They play. I watch them intently.



Fertile Knowledge

Erin King



We Burned the Nest

Eric Turner

And whatever hornets wriggled out,
Stumbled like drunks. Not one flew.

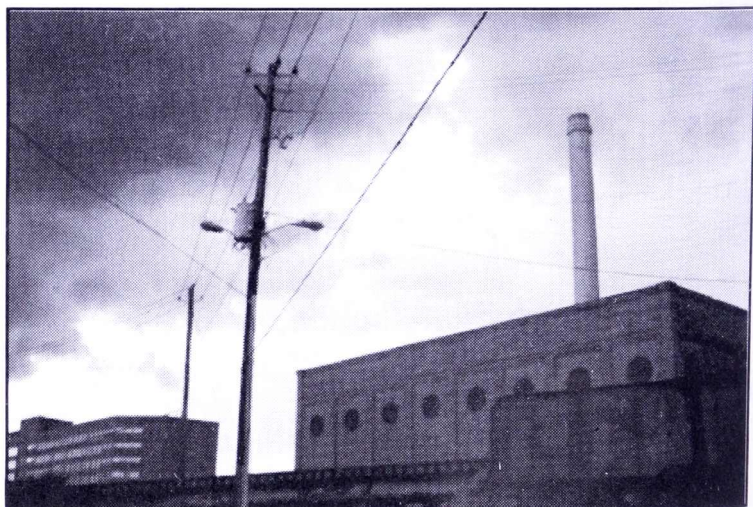
The delicate paper of it vaporized.
The surrounding brush was dry
Like a tinderbox. Ashes
Spiraled up, glowing until
They were a dead
Pale gray and
Shriveled, floating still.

There was a dry crackle,
Then
A nightingale's arpeggio.



Harbinger

Gina Alberici



Breakfast

Kristin Taylor

Across the table, you eat
your meal and half of mine,
speaking nonsense syllables
to find the years we have lost;
I have found them in my mouth
as old, regretted words
we claim we have forgotten.

I know your father,
my grandfather, would come home,
lay you across his bed
to swing the thick leather down,
burning your skin
half as much as your memory,
his smell of tobacco and liquor
still the seal on your promise
to be a father unlike him.

You never broke it,
though I do not tell you.
The words sit in my mouth
filled with pancakes.
We leave
two empty plates on the table.



The Anticipation

Christin Holloway



Nursery Rhyme

Adrianna Mateo

This is a song with measured words –
(must fight to make the thought remain)
These verses shall remain unheard,

*(How easy, how free the flight of birds
thought the little girl at her hopscotch game)*
This is a song with measured words –

my tongue's been broken into thirds –
(shh, shh, the hush of shame)
These verses shall remain unheard;

*a child a mother the drunken slurs
(a crash a broken window pane)*
This is a song, with measured words,

of a house where the unspeakable occurred –
(her glinting eyes and unwavering aim)
These verses shall remain unheard

because the secrets were interred –
the accused, forgotten, as was my name –
*This is a song with measured words
These verses shall remain unheard*



The Gifts

Heather Snyder

Love and Kindness are with me wherever I go,
They are a constant reminder of the love that was shown to me.

They are a constant reminder to me to keep going no matter what,
no matter how hard things get, these two things always seem to
give
me the strength to carry on.

They are always there to remind me that I can overcome any
obstacle,
because of being given these two precious gifts.

Whenever I think of them,
a smile comes to my face,
as I remember the day that I was awarded them.
Then with anguish I remember the days I did not have them,
yet everyday longed and hoped for these gifts to come soon.
Wondering what it would be like to have these amazing gifts in my
life,
wondering if I would ever have these gifts in my life.

My life before was filled with pain and suffering,
it was filled with broken dreams and questions of what was to
come,
what was I to become? There were no answers to these puzzling
questions,
just the drive to keep going even though the road ahead held no
promises.

Once these gifts were here it was like a breath of fresh air.
My life was never the same again, it was a thousand times better.
Suddenly the road ahead held many promises with dreams coming
true.

Pain was being erased and replaced with hope for the future.
I now understood what I had been missing for so many years,



and have been in awe of this fact ever since.

I intend to protect these precious gifts, Love and Kindness,
for they were a gift given by God directly to me.
Not to be taken for granted, but to hold dear all the days of my
life.

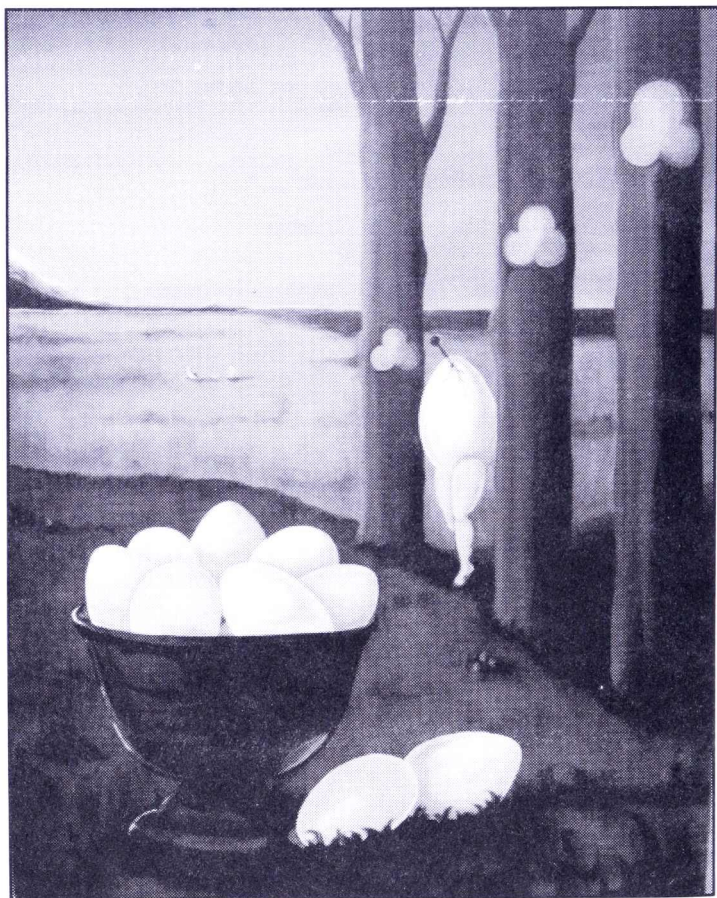
They were given for me to embrace life,
to embrace Love and Kindness in this life.

I will never forget Love and Kindness,
for they are with me wherever I go.



Corruption of Chastity

Stacy Tsui



The Tablecloth

Lacey Allmond

Creeping towards the door
away from the table
when mom and dad
had a fight
tears welling in my
flood light eyes
sobbing, yelling,
flinging mail across the table.

Bills scattered on
the gingham tablecloth
a soft
s o b
e c h o e s e c h o e s
t h r o u g h o u t
she wanted all the family
to see
how much she loved me
but she was
struggling to provide.

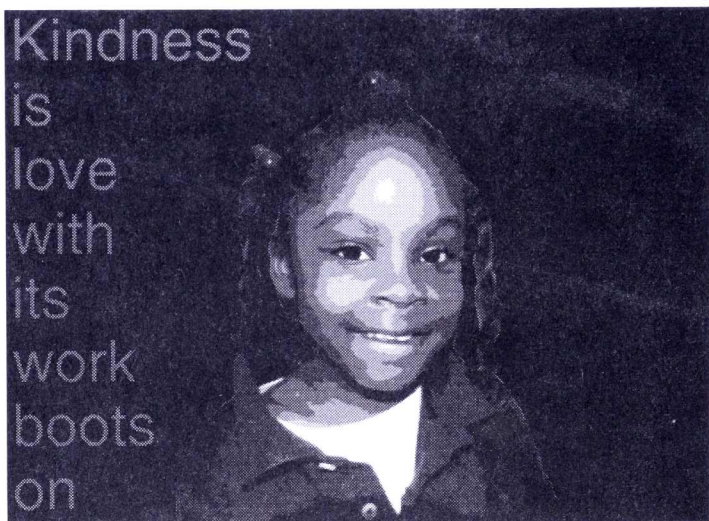
Every week they fought
and the bills became
our paper tablecloth.

I went outside to play
my dad never followed
behind me
he was busy
picking up
bills
trying to find
the gingham tablecloth.



Young Lady

Neal Jordan



Corner's keepers

Anna Dunson

Spines are a luxury among the backless
No room you see,
it's simply a matter of spatial efficiency
I, am backless however resourceful

The throat
Home to
an entire roll of bubble tape, swallowed at seven
twenty-two years of cul de sac life, swallowed with saccharin
a tongue bit entirely too hard, swallowed for silence
swallowed words
swallowed pride
and soon to be
swallowed spine

Ah, pity about that damned gag reflex of mine
each vertebrae downed threatened regurgitation
as salt-filled as the esophagus' prelude of choked on tears

yet now still, I am backless
and who are you to argue
you've never even seen it

I broke the most elementary rule
while the golden stood scoffing
You showed me yours,
and I have yet to show you mine

Because well I
I, am backless

Tourists at the Radcliffe Camera

Kristin Taylor



Poems in Outline

Crystal JenkinsWoods

They don't realize how they spook me,
or maybe in their need can't accept
I've yet to name them,
have never swayed to their cadences,
have not taken them into my body like air
and exhaled them extant.

Sometimes when I come down a hall
or stand sagging in an elevator after work,
one will condense beside me,
gruesome, musty, exigent. Though it flickers
in my periphery, I don't look. I know
what it wants.



Mea Vox Rauca

Matthew Farina



Research and Development

Scott Wilkerson

You would not write this
as I would not imagine
these lines in crippled geometries
scaled up for another of your
comprehensive reviews.
True, there remains in all
this a civil resolution though
perhaps one without absolute values,
that magnetic north of deepest learning,
a plunder of concentric betrayals and
ludic impostures.

I need some new material
and some say, perhaps, a ghost lyricist,
unspooling ideas secretly among the marginalia of
your recipes and daybooks, folding himself
into a repertory of nocturnal maneuvers, and, it's
true:
looking good from a distance.

As for my own incidental involvement here,
I could say only that objects are suspended
before the gravity of your aesthetic as water
before the
solemnity and censure of stone.

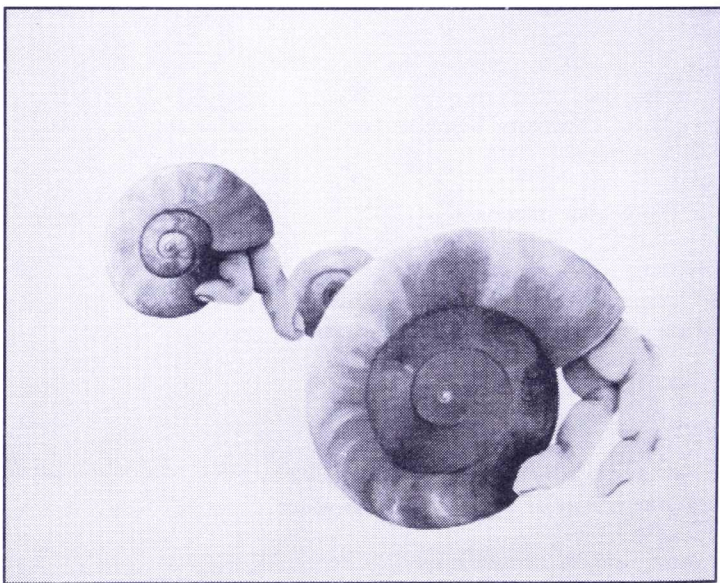
(I imagined here immodest claims
about the river in our history, the turn of
forgotten grace in the last instant before
a boat drifts too far from the shore,
spinning, as we all must, on chance
operations flooding through
our sacraments of logic.)

It is a failed program and a failed poem,
which, for now, we will keep to ourselves.



Crabs Defying Gravity

Stacy Tsui



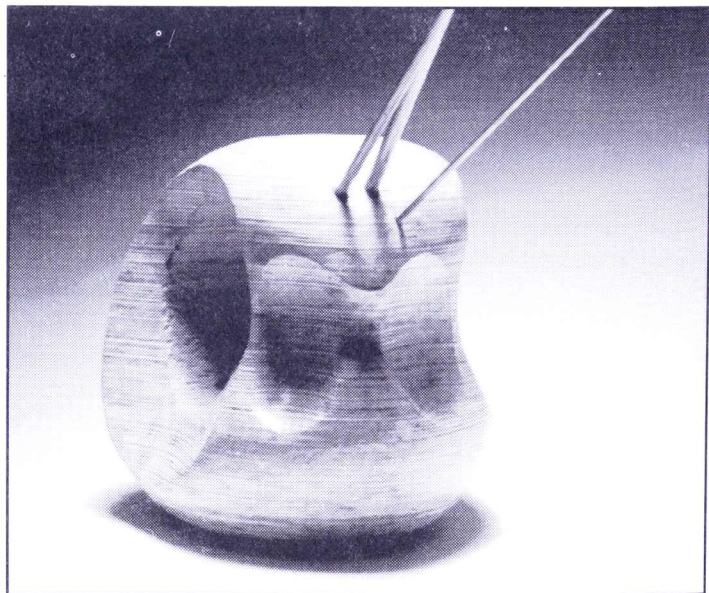
...will not use status updates as a dysfunctional form of communication

Nicole DeVries

is updating a Facebook status.
thinks "people are just DNA's way of making more DNA."
is sure there's something funny about this cactus, but she can't put her finger on it
is at work wishing there were a pole in the break room-
maybe then she'd get back to the grind better.
can ride a bike with no handle bars.
is many things and things that aren't things...
is like a friend, without the R...
is in love... with soup. But will it look in her eyes whilst inside her? No...
is Dr. Adewole Aremu- a director with the Union Bank of Nigeria in Lagos - and I
wish to speak to you most
urgently about a matter regarding the sum of \$39,000,000 US Dollars...
has a chicken in the oven and a cat on her lap & is thankful it's not the other way round.
wonders if 3 out of 4 suffer from something does that make the other 1 enjoy it?
is reading other statuses but your status is important to her - Please stay online
and your status will be read in priority sequence. Approximate wait time...
is wondering how her and ** are going to become pirates.....
is right 90% of the time so why worry about the other 3%?
thinks therapy is expensive but bubble wrap is cheap.
wants to be in Calgary with her chaps & cowboy hat.
is < 3 like 1 or 2 or something..
will not use status for her egocentrism.
is too scatter-brained to decide on a status.
is now available in Version 2.0 (Beta).
is eating elephants one bite at time.

Pierced #2

Patti Madeo



Storage

John Summerfield

Even now, when door swings wide enough
a path exists through the woods
the place with the silo
stale and tall, the rich earth rising up,
covered in unfriendly vines
echoing out
spooky for those unacquainted with hollowness,
with emptiness -
thunderclaps unzip above the cavernous opening, and
large saucers appear in the eyes
etched by the bright light, and then the tiny beads of glass -
the path met us quickly
dog fennel in our faces
dog day afternoons
voluble verity ungarrished,
youths sounding bells and cockle
shells scattered with homework and report cards
never to be signed, and
the nails in the flat of the foot
never to be forgotten
scarring forever, and
the slippery, rusted tin roof, and
smelly trailer park septic
muddy shoes washed in detergent, expelled
from the washer room -
our wordless minds searching ways to be bitter
though we fabricate helplessness, and secrete
a boor upon a stump, hollering
out for direction
in a dire and deadly dance with fate
flattened feet
disciplined to dance for the word, discontent,
bright, vivacious minds filthy with incapacity,
misdirection, non-bravado
disbelievers in all but the trail, and
the hollowness of the silo
empty, but for the sounds of the shoeless



Pendulum

Adrianna Mateo

Sometimes a second seems to hold its breath.
The quiet swing suspends itself, midair –
a shade of gray. The momentary still
inexorably breaks itself as time
advances onwards, plunging towards home
(that other silence). Does that mass, alone

on link of chain, mark passage? Does that lone
weight press its heaviness with gusting breath
or is it heaviest suspended? Time
and time again, the seconds borne by air
fly out of Future's womb and find their home
in Past. They pass, then fade, in dying still. . . .

The hanging bodies are yet raw. A still
from Terezin can even stop my breath
the best of days: a little girl, alone
and dangling on looped rope, swaying in air.
Her back's half-turned. She has no face. But time
revealed she called the transit camp her home.

It's twelve A.M. At last, returning home
from shooting photographs. That tart cologne
is still embedded in the sheets. The air,
filled with metallic musk, defeats my breath.
The wounds continue festering. They're still
immune to that omniscient healer, Time.

The next day I'll be free. I'll spend my time
as I now often do: I'll stay at home,
arrange some browning stalks of baby's breath
with marigolds and pour myself some distilled
happiness. I'll watch TV, alone,
and listen to the hushed fuzz fill the air. . . .



A child is "born" when it first drinks the air.
What of the months of breathing fluid time
within its cell? A fetus, all alone
in darkness, linked by cord to transient home,
can only float in silence. In that still,
the unborn waits to take its own first breath.

*The swing hiccups in air between the breaths
of summer breeze. "It's time to go back home,"
she says, dissolving. . . .*

Shivering, I'm still alone.



Clothesline

Gina Alberici



My Own Two Feet

Danielle Melissovas Thompson

My own two feet, my pedicured feet,
Feet that press the gas pedal of my candy-apple red Camaro
Feet that walk me into Saks,
And that wear Manolo Blahniks.
My own two feet, that I hardly ever stand on,
These feet that I take such good care of,
Have walked me to my downfall, and brought me to my knees,
Pleading, needing someone to take care of me.

These feet now stand in sensible shoes
As I stand working, watching the shoppers go by,
Chipped nail polish and a chipped conscience.
These feet finally serve me well,
As I serve others,
And stand on my own two feet.

The Buddhist Desperado

Erick Richman

Fist pound
Door down
Then an eternity of alcoholic eyes
and inebriated souls look in, seeing his
left hand grip a flower
as the right holds a gun.
seems then
that right
refuses admittedly to wrong, but
left, if declared right, follows right along.



Fall

Kristin Taylor

In autumn, I am the one with
the rake, trying to uncover
grass at sight of the first
leaf. I work with purpose.

Through the window, you observe
me like a specimen, wait until I come
inside to say leaves belong where they
have fallen.



Waffle House Redemption

Danielle Melissovas

Thompson

Hi. The name's Michael. You look like a nice enough person, so I might as well tell you my story...

My girlfriend Amy, the only person in the world I wanted to spend Christmas with, had left me. On Thanksgiving. My parents were gone, and my Holly Golightly of a sister was somewhere, probably with one of her boyfriends, who was probably buying her much more than just breakfast, at Tiffany's. And my buddies, my last resort, were with their own families or girlfriends. So there I was, at the local friendly Waffle House on Christmas night. I felt sorry for the people around me, because who knows what their stories were about why they were here tonight. They probably felt sorry for me too...then again maybe not.

I looked out the window and saw the red, black, and yellow awning stretching around the building like a coral snake. There was something about all that light inside the restaurant – the light coming from those yellow-pink fluorescent globes the size of beach balls hanging from the dust-coated ceiling. I looked down the row of them, hanging above the bar, and each one was slightly hidden by the one in front of it, so that they looked like all eight phases of the moon. Tonight there was no visible moon outside, just a cloudless sky, sprinkled with stars, reflecting all that light from the Waffle House.

Inside was the usual Waffle House landscape – the old lady drinking coffee by herself; the young mother with two kids who were bored and tired, but who got an occasional boost of energy from the Sprites they were drinking; the young couple, oblivious to the clanks of dishes and shouts of children; a middle-aged businessman with his laptop, who kept checking his cell phone for messages, probably eager to get back to work on December 26th. And then there were those of us at the bar. We had a front row seat to the frenetic kitchen work carried out by the busy waitresses and the sweaty cook. The oblong plates sat in line by the grill, waiting to be filled with hot greasy meals. A waitress



promptly plucked two warm mugs off of the stack and filled them with coffee. The kitchen worked like a well-greased machine, literally and figuratively.

The denizens of the Waffle House. How does one become part of that landscape? How many orders of hash browns and cheese grits must one eat before getting cast as a regular in the Waffle House daily drama? I think it happens without your knowing it. It happens when you don't have to look at the menu to know what you want to order. It happens when you stop questioning the difference between smothered, covered, and topped.

Tonight, though, there was a new addition to the usual cast of characters. The Valley Rescue Mission preacher sat in the corner booth with his third cup of coffee, and he would easily strike up conversations with those in the neighboring booths. He had his Bible open on the table, and occasionally would read aloud a passage from the story of Jesus' birth to those who would listen: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Christmas seemed to have so much meaning for him; he was the only one who really looked happy about being at a Waffle House on Christmas night.

For my own meal, I had ordered a patty melt and – you guessed it – hash browns and cheese grits. My coffee had grown cold. The old lady a couple bar seats down from me had repeatedly asked the waitress to make the coffee stronger, she said the flavor wasn't rich enough. I saw the old lady once again reach her wrinkled hand out and pour some more scotch into her mug.

"Did you save room for pie, honey?" the waitress Crystal asked as I crumpled up my napkin.

"No, not tonight" I said. With that she handed me my handwritten yellow receipt. After getting a few bills out of my wallet – hmm, it was the wallet Amy gave me last Christmas – I made my way to the check-out line to pay. Just then I felt a chilly



wind blow across my neck from the doorway, and heard a muffled voice say, "Nobody move!"

I turned around and saw the last person I ever expected to see inside Waffle House. My hand froze, still hovering above the bar, reaching to hand over money to the clerk, but then I realized that my money might not be going towards hash browns tonight.

"No cell phones! No one calls the police! Everybody's gonna stay right here until I get what I want." The manager came out from the kitchen to see what was going on. "You! You get everyone out here from the back, and I wanna see you lock all the doors, now!"

The stunned manager obeyed. "Now I want the blinds down on all the windows. Quickly!" Crystal, now shaking, went to each of the windows and let down venetian blinds, and as she did, decades of dust wafted off of them and into the air. When all the windows were concealed, it suddenly felt like we were inside of a vault – a vault that smelled of bacon grease and waffle batter.

The mother with the two children made them go under their table to hide. The young man sitting with his girlfriend quickly went over to her side of the table to protect her.

The intruder announced calmly, "Alright, listen up, ladies and gentlemen.... In my left hand I have a bag. A simple, ordinary bag. And into this bag each one of you is going to place your wallets, your keys, your cell phones, and your watches. In my right hand, I have a gun. A simple, ordinary Beretta 92, which will, if you do not comply, blow your simple, ordinary heads off! Am I clear? ... I said am I clear?"

Nervous heads all around the room nodded in understanding. At this moment I started wishing I had gone to Huddle House instead. Of all the Waffle Houses in the world, this chump had to walk into mine.

He opened his drawstring bag, while at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the people in the long, rectangular room, and then began to make his rounds. "You in booth number



one, let's start with you." The middle-aged businessman was in booth number one, and with his hands shaking he pulled out his wallet from his back pocket, placed it in the thief's bag, and then slid his cell phone out of its leather case on his belt, and did likewise.

"Very good!" said the criminal, looking around, "See, this gentlemen has just set you all a good example. Now how about you, ma'am," he said as he approached the young mother. She was in tears at this point, and below the table she tried to block her children with her legs as best she could. She also retrieved her wallet, cell phone and keys from her purse, and placed them in the bag. He methodically went to each table, collecting his goods until the bag had grown heavy. He came to me finally. He must have thought he saw something in my eyes because he warned me, "Don't be a hero today, buddy;" but that wasn't where my thoughts were at all.

After he left me, my eye caught the preacher in the corner praying, with his head bowed. The criminal, satisfied with his collection, stepped out front and center again for another monologue. "Alright, you did nicely with part one. Now for part two." He turned to look at one of the waitresses, frozen behind the counter. Her weary grey-blue eyes were almost the same color as her Waffle House uniform shirt. He approached her. "What's your name, sweetheart?"

With her lips quivering she meekly said, "Katie."

"Katie... *you're* going to open the register, and put all the money into this bag... Now that doesn't sound hard, does it?"

"N-no, it doesn't."

"And how 'bout a smile with that...honey."

Katie managed a tear-stained trembling smile while she fulfilled his greedy request. As we were watching them, the faint whine of police sirens seeped inside our Waffle House vault. The intruder was the first to notice it. "Alright, who broke the rules? Who called the cops? I wanna know now!" With that he shot his Beretta off into the air, and the bullet hit one of those yellow-pink



fluorescent orbs, shattering the plastic and causing the fixture to fall to the counter below. It got slightly darker in the Waffle House.

"Who called them? Is the back door locked too?" he sharply asked the manager.

"Yes, it's locked, and you have the keys," he replied.

"Well then, ladies and gents, you can thank whoever it was that made the call, because now, it looks like it's gonna be a long Christmas night for all of us."

We heard everything that the police negotiator said through the bullhorn, but none of it fazed the criminal. He sat at the bar, facing outwards. With the one hand he drummed his fingers, and with the other hand he tightly gripped the Beretta. None of us wanted to look directly at him, yet we each occasionally glanced at him hoping to catch some indication about what was coming from him next.

"Coffee." His gruff, one-word command startled even the most steel-nerved of those around us. One of the waitresses jumped up to turn the coffee maker back on. "W-would you like cream or sugar?"

"Black."

The old lady at the end of the bar slipped a mini bottle of Jack Daniels out of her purse and flashed it to the waitress. She whispered to her, "Put this in his coffee. He'll get drunk, relaxed and start to forget things – that's how it works for me. Maybe we can get his gun then, and the strong coffee will hide the flavor too." The waitress nodded her head and held the mug out for the old lady to dispense her secret weapon. "There goes a month's social security," the lady whispered.

I watched the exchange, and then waited to see what would happen. Drunken men get either very giddy or very angry. I hoped our thief wouldn't turn out to be an angry drunk.

I think God had answered a few prayers from our preach-



er comrade. About twenty minutes after receiving the old lady's concoction, the criminal seemed noticeably more relaxed, and even laid his gun down on the bar in front of him for a moment but then picked it back up. The police negotiator pressed on outside.

The criminal muttered to himself, "They're wastin' everybody's time out there! I wish they'd quit makin' all that noise..." He snatched up his bag of stolen wares and fished out a wallet. Digging through the zippered compartment he pulled out two quarters, and then headed for the juke box, which had sat silent watching the scene with the rest of us. The criminal took only a few seconds to make his selection. Immediately a mood-breaking tune flowed out of the speakers – Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville." Then he did something that shocked us even more than when he shot down the light fixture. He began to sing.

"Livin' on sponge cake... Strummin' my six-string..." his slurred words and creaky voice echoed through the silent room. "It's nobody's fault..."

The young couple looked at each other in amazement. The children looked up at their mother with questioning eyes.

"Searchin' for my lost shaker of salt... oh, there it is..." He stumbled over to the bar and picked up a salt shaker, and then a pepper shaker, and put them in his pocket. Crystal had to hold back a giggle.

"More coffee!" Unfortunately his gun was still in his hand, and occasionally he would gesture with it as he sang.

I don't know what possessed me to do this, but when the second chorus began...I started to sing with him. The others joined in one by one. Soon the entire Waffle House chorus was nervously united in song. I wondered what would happen after our song was over.



Carnivorous

Jarred Wiehe

I am not some piece of meat hanging on some hook
To be ravaged by your hands, shoulders, eyes, hips, lips,
By your hormones.
Sexy?
You think you're sexy?
Calling me up at 12:18 Wednesday Night/Thursday Morning,
Not sexy.
"Hey, Jarred!"
"Hey, who is this?"
"It's me, Jeremy!"
"No, you see, I don't know a Jeremy."
"Yes you do. You gave me your number downtown at Fountain
City!"
"No, no I didn't, as a rule I don't. But it's 12:18 Wednesday
Night/Thursday Morning, so I'll play along... What do you
want, Jeremy?"
"OH...I'M HORNY!"
"Oh..."
"Can you help me out?"
"No, no, Jeremy I cannot."
"But everyone said you were gay!"
"Oh... Well, that makes them liars, now doesn't it, Jeremy. Um,
good night, and good luck with you and your penis."
Then I get these internet messages,
A little too much honesty for one box, if you know what I'm say-
ing.
I get: "I wish you would come out of the closet so you could give
me head."
"Baby, I'll see you later tonight"
Or, my personal favorite:
"My cock will break you in half."
...
So, I cry.
And I run into my empty bathtub, and I shut the shower curtain
so



The cruel, cruel world can't hurt me anymore with its libido.
And I wait for my Catholic to heal over, to recompose...
And then I shout!
I shout to all the "Jeremy"s of the world,
I shout to each and every internet pervert who feels the need to
Hyperbolize his genitalia,

I shout:
"I am not BK.
You cannot have me 'Your Way!'
I ain't lookin for no hey-hey.
If you want more spice in your life,
Bitch, I've got pepper spray!"



Kronos Devouring Issac

Stacy Tsui



Newton's Third Law

Anna Dunson

I saw in colours today
six years to the day
we claimed them
as our preference

It was a video recorded confession
that I never lived up to nor down.

And now some hipster jewelry line
with lily pads for necklaces
priced a rich waste
has trademarked our name

And I never see you anymore
to call you by yours.



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